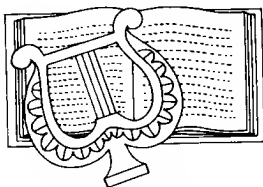




# THE MUTINY OF THE THUNDER



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Ruth Candler Lovett

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THE  
MUTINY OF THE THUNDER

BY  
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AUTHOR OF

"THE BLACK ANGEL," "STAR OF THE SOUTH," "FIERY CROSS,"  
"REBEL PRIVATEER," ETC., ETC.



LONDON:  
CHARLES H. CLARKE, 9 RED LION COURT,  
FLEET STREET.



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# THE MUTINY OF THE THUNDER

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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

### THE READER INTRODUCED TO SIMON THE SAILOR.

INTRODUCTIONS and Prefaces are often tedious and too long sometimes altogether skipped by the impatient reader.

Now this chapter, we can promise, shall be a very short one.

We will just introduce the reader to a few of the characters of our narrative, so that he may understand their relations to each other, and then we will go right ahead, and tell the story of the mutiny of the ship *Thunder*, the fight for the ten thousand pounds of gold, and what came of it.

This will form one of the voyages of our hero—Simon the Sailor.

Why was he called Simon the Sailor?

He himself used to declare, laughingly, that it was because it was not his name.

George Simon Royston. Such were his Christian and surnames in full.

But the simple people down at the quiet country village where he was born and bred, would speak it and write it—Simon the Sailor—and as Simon the Sailor he was known and welcomed, when he returned from a voyage, to spend a few weeks among the quiet country lanes.

His father had been a lieutenant in the coastguard, and having been disabled in an affray with smugglers, received a small pension, and was sent about his business.

Forty pounds a year was the munificent income allowed him by a grateful country, to support himself, wife, and son.

But, fortunately for George Royston, senior, he had a windfall, in the shape of a legacy.

It was a freehold farm of about eighty acres, and on this the disabled lieutenant settled down, grateful to kind fortune for enabling him thus to spend the remainder of his days in peace and plenty ; for with farm and pension he could not fail to make a very fair income.

Now the great man of the village, "The Squire," was, or rather had been, one Colonel Vandaleur, of an old and proud family, but now reduced almost to poverty.

The great house was unoccupied, and, sad blow to the Vandaleur pride, was let to strangers.

The Colonel took up his abode in a pretty farm-house appertaining to the estate. It was charmingly situated on the banks of the Isis, and, but for the matter of pride, he might have been comfortable enough there.

The proud, aristocratic Colonel, and the bluff old coast-guard Lieutenant, were friends—great friends. They had known each other in former days, and Lieutenant Royston had saved the life of Colonel Vandaleur, then only a captain, and had, moreover, rendered him other important services.

Colonel Vandaleur saw no society—his pride would not permit him—except Lieutenant Royston.

The two retired officers of Her Majesty's service were constantly together, and to the Lieutenant, Vandaleur unbended from his stately family pride. They boated, fished, and strolled together, talked over old times, and were as great friends as possible.

By and bye a son was born to Lieutenant Royston, and shortly after, his wife died. Out of compliment to the Colonel, he called the boy George St. Cymon Royston. For St. Cymon was a family name of Vandaleur.

Once on a time there had been a peerage in the family, and the head of the house of Vandaleur was Earl St. Cymon.

We have said that the Colonel was born proud. It is doubtful whether he at all appreciated or liked the compliment paid him by the lieutenant.

Be that as it may, he said nothing on the subject. In due course a daughter was born to him ; and his wife, too, died. So these two men friends were left alone, one with an only son, the other with an only daughter.

The children grew up together ; the girl beautiful, the boy handsome, athletic, and high-spirited. They were always together.

The Colonel, as his daughter budded from childhood to girlhood grew anxious. He had ambitious views for his lovely daughter. Dreamed that she should make a brilliant and wealthy marriage, and reinstate the fallen fortunes of the house of Vandaleur.

He was a man of the world, and foresaw the possible consequences of an unrestrained intercourse between two young people, both near about of an age, and both with more than a usual share of personal attraction.

But he could do nothing. It was impossible to put an abrupt stop to an intimacy which had been years in growth.

Both were well grown ; forward for their age. The lad at sixteen looked a young man ; the girl at fifteen and a half might easily have passed for eighteen.

To the terrible annoyance of Colonel Vandaleur, people began to talk of the two as so well suited—made for each other.

And then there was that unfortunate coincidence in the one Christian name ; to which Vandaleur considered the Lieutenant's son had no right.

George St. Cymon Royston.

Helen St. Cymon Vandaleur.

It was most annoying and vexatious ; but there was no help for it.

And then an event happened which could not fail to be another bond of sympathy between the young people. Helen was passionately fond of being on the water, and despite the prohibitions of her father and governess, would often go out in the skiff alone, and, setting the sail, would often glide up or down the stream, as the wind suited.

At last an accident occurred ; there came a sudden puff of wind, and the boat upset.

She must have been drowned but for our hero, Simon the

Sailor, who, nearly at the sacrifice of his own life, fetched her inanimate form up from the bottom, and brought her to land, where, after time and care, she recovered.

The two were now quite young lovers. The Colonel saw and groaned in spirit, utterly at a loss what to do. Great then, was his delight when the son of the old Lieutenant expressed a wish to go to sea.

The Colonel did all he could to encourage him in this idea ; and even took the trouble to go up to London, and use his influence with a firm of shipowners he knew.

Lieutenant Royston was grateful, and so was his son, neither dreaming of the inner motive which prompted this unwonted interest of the Colonel in the lad.

And so he went to sea. But not without a final parting with Helen, all alone in the orchard, near the place where he had dragged her half drowned from the river.

He sailed away, and in nine months came back, sunburnt, handsomer than ever, and quite manly in appearance. She, too, had increased in loveliness.

And so he went, voyage after voyage ; sometimes away six months, sometimes nine, seldom more. On each return he would spend a few weeks in his native place.

The return of Simon the Sailor from a voyage was eagerly looked forward to by many in the village, for he was a capital story-teller, and had many wondrous yarns of his adventures to relate.

And it came to pass that the sympathy between him and Helen grew into a close attachment. This was unknown to the Colonel, who, though he feared, did not suspect that this youth and maiden had already exchanged vows of constancy. They kept their secret to themselves.

Helen felt instinctively that her father would be displeased, and with girlish weakness, but woman's tact, managed to conceal her feelings.

Simon the Sailor had made six voyages, when on his return from the seventh he found that the fair Helen and her father had gone ; left the village for good and all, perhaps for ever.

The Colonel had received a lucrative and honourable position under Government, and had gone out to Sydney,

**New South Wales.** It was a heavy blow for Royston ; the more so that Helen had left him no farewell letter. At least, he received none, though she had written to him.

This had, unfortunately, fallen into her father's hands, and he, using a parent's privilege, had opened and read it. He was horrified, aghast at the contents, breathing of love, and speaking of the happy day when they should meet again.

From that day forth he resolved it should be the object of his life to cure Helen of her foolish, insane passion for one so much beneath her ; only a merchant officer—Simon the Sailor.

There is a saying that absence makes the heart grow fonder. It is not true. Royston's image grew fainter and fainter in Helen's dreams and thoughts. Other forms, other admirers, crowded around the young lady.

She was flattered and courted, her father constantly dining in her ears that she must make a great, a noble marriage ; that no one under the rank of a peer, or honourable at least, was good enough for her.

Meanwhile Simon the Sailor comforted himself with this thought—

" We shall meet again. I will work hard at my calling, and when I have a ship of my own then Helen shall be my wife."

They did meet at last. It was in Sydney. The Colonel received him somewhat coldly. Helen kindly, but with a stiff politeness he had never experienced before.

Slowly the sad truth broke on him, that flattery, time, absence, and pride had thrown up a barrier between them. She was no longer Helen, a country girl, but a fashionable young lady, the bellè of Sydney. And she knew it.

And here our story begins.

## CHAPTER I.

## THE LUST OF GOLD.

**W**ANTED for the Ship THUNDER, Captain NOAH PLUNKETT, for London direct—

Able Seamen,  
Cook,  
Carpenter,  
Cuddy Servant,  
2nd Mate.

Wages for A. B's Twenty Pounds a Month, or Eighty Pounds for the Run. To Sail at once.

For Freight or Passage, apply to the Agents, GILCHRIST, ALEXANDER & Co., or at the Shipping Office within.

This notice, amidst several others, all relating to the sailing of vessels and such like matters, was posted outside a shipping office at the harbour end of George Street, Sydney. The period was between 1850 and 1860, when the gold fever was at its height. Hence the exorbitant wages captains and owners were obliged to offer to get a crew to take their ships back to England.

Around the shipping office, lounging about, or in and near the various public-houses, which abounded in the vicinity, were a number of men, all more or less seafaring in their appearance.

Some, however, seemed to partake more of the gold-digger or long-shore loafer than the genuine sailor. There were red shirts, big knives, boots reaching above knee, and here and there the butt of a revolver pistol could be seen protruding from the belt of some one or other.

A rough lot of men, certainly, and by no means prepossessing in appearance. Some of them scanned the placard relating to the Thunder, and seemed struck thereby.

"Eighty pounds is a good price for a run home," remarked a broad-shouldered, bull-necked man, apparently about forty years of age—"a thundering good price; why, with a good start round the Horn she can do it in three months."

"I've a 'nation good mind to ship in her; Noah Plunkett,

of Salem, is skipper, and Black Ball Billy, of New York, mate," remarked the other sailor.

"The blazes! they are two hell-fire bullies if ever there was one."

At this moment they were joined by another man, whose appearance presented a striking contrast to that of the other two, both of whom were big burly men.

"Eh! what's that, mate, thinking of shipping in the Thunder, eh?"

"Well, Death's Head Dick," said the first man, "we was a talking of it, me and Brown Bill here."

The man with the ghastly nickname grimaced, displaying a set of white teeth from ear to ear—

"You might do worse; and if things should turn out all right you couldn't do better."

"How's that, my churchyard chicken?" asked Boston Bill.

"Well, let's come over to the King Billy, and do a liquor," replied Death's Head Dick, "and then we'll talk here comes Sam, the Baltimore Buck, he'll come too."

Joined by the last comer, a gigantic fellow about six feet four, in red shirt and big boots, looking more like a Californian miner than a sailor, the four men went over the road and entered a small private bar, with just room for them, at the King William public-house.

He who bore the dreadful name, was indeed a strange-looking character; ugly to repulsiveness in expression and features, he was above the middle height, and walked and stood with a stoop; his eyes were large, black, and deep set in hollow orbits; his face was a sickly yellow colour; and for beard, some straggling hairs did duty; his nose was small and turned up; his mouth unnaturally wide.

When he grinned, the double row of white teeth had a most unpleasant look, and could hardly fail to remind the observer of a skull. It was this, and the cadaverous leanness of his face, which gained him the terrible *sobriquet* of Death's Head Dick: his hair was scanty, straight, and hung about his head in dank and damp-looking locks.

Altogether, he gave a very good representation of an animated corpse, and some sailor or other had christened him with the nickname, which hung about him ever after.



Immediately after the four men had left the shipping-office, a young man came up, and proceeded to inspect the various placards. He had the appearance of a merchant officer, a good-looking, frank, sunburnt young fellow, of some four or five-and-twenty years apparently.

He was dressed with considerable care. A pilot jacket of fine cloth, white duck trousers, well-polished shoes, a blue cloth cap with narrow gold cord, and a dark blue handkerchief loosely, but becomingly, tied round his neck.

His features were good, his eyes grey, clear and piercing, and there was an expression on his face of frank good humour, which did not fail to impress most strangers favourably.

But there was that about the cut of the mouth, and the somewhat prominent chin, on which grew a curly tawny beard, with that peculiar gloss and softness which only beards never touched by the razor can boast of, which bespoke a firm and resolute spirit.

He wore on the little finger of his right hand a signet ring, and around his neck a gold chain. Altogether, this young officer looked a bit of a dandy. Nevertheless, he was every inch a sailor, and could take his place among men, as he had proved more than once.

"H'm," he said to himself after scanning all the placards, "Thunder wants a second mate, big ship—fine ship—big wages—bound for London. Esmeralda wants a mate; small clipper barque bound for Calcutta—I know her. Dare say a good deal the most comfortable of the two. Yes; I certainly think I'd rather be mate of a small barque than second of a big ship."

Thus musing he entered the shipping office, made some inquiries as to the Esmeralda, and as the captain was there at the time, almost decided to sign articles at once.

"I'll think of it a bit, Captain Rutter," he said, "and let you know in the course of an hour or so." Then he strolled out into the street.

The Captain of the Esmeralda called after him.

"I say, Mister, I suppose I may consider it about settled—you'll ship. I'm anxious to get her ready for sea."

"Well, I reckon you may," called back the young officer,

and the next moment entered the King William, and called for a drink of ginger-beer and ale mixed.

He was in the next partition to the four men of whom we have before spoken. The woodwork was thin, warped, and full of cracks, and his ears being wonderfully sharpened, some fragments of the conversation reached him which caused him to move nearer and listen intently.

"Have you any idea how much gold dust the Thunder takes home?"

"Nary bit," replied Boston Bill. "They do say she have a few ounces."

"A few ounces! just listen to me. That ere ship has got in her lower hold, about thirty feet abaft the mainmast, ten thousand pounds' weight of gold, all in little leather bags, and the leather bags in strong oak boxes. That's a fact, that is."

"Ten thousand pounds' weight! Why how many ounces is that?"

"Twelve ounces to a pound; a hundred and twenty thousand ounces; and with gold at three pound seventeen and sixpence an ounce, worth over four hundred thousand pounds—right on to half a million sovereigns! What do you think of that, lads?"

"Oh, Lord! it makes my mouth water," said Baltimore Buck. "I wish I had the fingerin' of it."

"Look here, mates," said Death's Head Dick, impressively. "There seems to me no reason why we shouldn't all of us have the fingerin' of some of it."

"The devil there ain't! how's it to be done, my grave-bird? Go and board her in the bay? Why it would be rank piracy and madness, too, with a couple of men-o'-war lying in port."

"You always was a fool, Boston Bill, and never won't be any better. Who said anything about boarding her in the bay?"

"How then?"

"Why, suppose there was a dozen of us aboard as could all depend one on t'other—she's sure to be short handed, men are so scarce—the gold might be got at without any trouble, maybe without the captain or officers knowing any-

thing about it, or maybe when they saw it was no use, they'd take it quietly."

"And if they didn't take it quietly?" asked the Baltimore uck.

"Slit all their wizens, run the ship somewhere on the coast of South America, and scuttle her."

"And what of the passengers?"

"To blazes with the passengers! most of 'em comes to sea now with life-belts and such like fixings, let 'em have a swim for it."

There was a laugh at this terrible jest, and the conversation went on, the men gradually warming to the subject.

Now it must be understood that our young officer only heard fragments of this conversation; still he gathered its import, and knew that at least a suggestion of piracy and murder had been made.

The last words he heard were to this effect:—

"Well, lads, just see how many right down bully good men you can get to ship with us. A dozen or fifteen in all will do."

"We must have barkers of course."

"Course; and some powder and lead too."

"Well, I'll go up Pitt Street, to that Yankee boarding-house; there's some Californy chaps there. They ain't much of seamen, I take it, but they're thorough-going rowdies, game for anything, from pitch-and-toss to murder. Let's meet again in a couple of hours' time," said Death's Head Dick.

The others agreed, and then the young officer heard them put down their glasses and go out: he waited for a few moments and then followed.

When he got out into the street they were all gone, not one of the four was to be seen.

"What a confounded fool I was not to come out at once after them," he said to himself. "I ought to have seen them so as to recognise them another time. As it is, I have nothing but the voices to go by. There were four of them, I can swear to that."

After looking about for a short time he gave it up, and

went over to the shipping office again, by no means easy in his mind, or decided how to act.

"I must warn the Captain of the Thunder," he said, "that's the least I can do. He's a surly brute, though, by all account, and likely enough I shall get no thanks for it. And such a vague warning, too! I can't even point out the men I heard talking about the gold."

Just as he got to the door of the shipping office, a lady, followed by a servant in livery, entered.

He started when his eye fell on her, for although he could not see the face, he recognised the elegant, graceful figure.

If she saw him, she did not deign him the slightest notice, but walked straight up to the counter or desk.

"I wish to take a cabin passage for England in the first ship to sail. I have heard that the Thunder is to sail at once."

"Yes, madam. Passage money eighty to a hundred guineas. One hundred guineas for a stern cabin."

"I will take a stern cabin, if you please. Be good enough to book one for me, and make ready a receipt for half the passage money, which, I believe, is your rule."

"Yes, madam," said the clerk, hastening to obey her orders, while she employed herself in taking from her purse and counting out fifty guineas in notes and gold.

This sum she paid over, and taking the receipt, prepared to leave the office.

As she did so, her eye fell on the young officer, who stood at the entrance carelessly leaning up against the door-post. He had heard and seen all that had passed, with the exception that he did not know she had absolutely paid half the passage money.

She started and coloured up a little as she saw him; then, with the slightest possible inclination of the head, but not the faintest smile or sign of pleasure at recognizing him, she swept by, and passed out into the street.

For a moment or two he gazed after her—a bitter smile on his handsome face.

Then he hurried after her, overtook her, and touched her lightly on the shoulder.

She started—stopped—faced him, and cried indignantly—  
“Sir!”

“Miss Vandaleur—a word or two with you.”

She cried haughtily—

“I am at your service, Mr. Royston; though I must say, after what has passed, I am at a loss to know what you can have to say to me.”

“I wish to give you a word of advice on a very serious matter,” he said; “and I hope you will not regret it.”

“You do me too much honour, I am sure.”

Without noticing the taunt he went on—

“I heard you speak just now of engaging a passage in the ship Thunder.”

“I have engaged a passage, sir.”

“Then let me earnestly counsel you, as you value your life and safety, not to sail in that ship.”

“Your reason, sir,” she said, in a most scornful and irritable tone.

“I cannot go into the matter now,” he said, curtly, feeling, not unnaturally, annoyed at her cavalier treatment of him. “Again I repeat the warning—as you value your life do not sail in the Thunder.”

“I beg to inform you, sir, that your interference is uncalled for and impertinent. I shall certainly sail in the Thunder.”

“Once more I warn you, Miss Vandaleur do not sail in the Thunder.”

She turned on her heel, and without another word, or parting bow, walked on.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CAPTAIN OF THE THUNDER AND OUR HERO.—A WARNING.

THE young officer, after the rebuff on the part of the lady, gazed after her with a look half sorrowful, half indignant, and then turned on his heel and walked slowly back to the shipping office.

"Ah! Miss Helen Vandaleur," he said to himself, with a sigh; "prosperity and high society have made you proud, and you have forgotten the old days, at the old place at home, in dear old England. But I have not; I never shall. I will watch over you and guard you from evil and danger, even in spite of yourself; aye, in spite of all the world and yourself."

He was addressing nobody, but gave utterance to the words, speaking slowly, sadly, in tones singularly soft and gentle for a sailor.

Perhaps, could she have heard his murmured words, and read his thoughts, she, too, might have remembered the old days, and her heart might have softened.

Royston strolled back to the shipping office and sauntered up and down, smoking a cigar, apparently in careless idleness. But, in reality, he kept a bright look-out on the office, on all the sailors standing about, and, in fact, had his eyes open to everything which passed.

When one, two, or three sailors, or more, entered the shipping office, he would saunter carelessly across, and either stand at the door smoking his cigar, or follow them in. And so he mooned about, as the saying is, for one, two, or nearly three hours.

Business had been slack during the early part of the day, perhaps by reason of the intense heat. But towards three o'clock a crowd of sailors quickly assembled about the office, and it was evident business would be done, as many of them looked like "outward bounders," men in want of a ship, and on this particular day there were several vessels, including the Thunder, wanting crews.

"Now, then, for the Thunder," cried a "runner," a sort of tout for inducing seamen to ship, for each of whom he gets a commission. "Now, then, for the Thunder! a fine ship, big wages! a bully ship, lads!"

"Aye, and a bully for a skipper, and another for a mate, too," remarked a sailor. "I know 'em both, and you don't get me to make my mark in that ship's articles."

At this there was a laugh, but the words had no effect in deterring sailors from pressing forward. In a very short time there was quite a crowd around the desk, most of them wish-

ing to ship on board the Thunder. Royston, the young officer, appeared to take a deep interest in the proceedings, and his keen eye closely scrutinised the groups of seamen in and around the office.

There was such a crowd, however, inside the place, that he could not see those who were close to the counter. He could hear, however, all that went on, and was able to catch an occasional glimpse of those who signed articles.

"James Watson, able seaman," the clerk said, "sign your name here to the articles of the Thunder, month's advance as usual."

"Aye, aye, my hearty," replied the sailor; and then George Royston's quick ear caught the slow scratching of a pen as the seaman laboriously wrote his name—

"Edward Waters, A. B."

"Can't write—make my mark."

The clerk wrote the name for the man, and he then made his mark.

"Richard Smith."

"Right you are! give us hold of the pen. There, that's soon settled!"

The young officer started at the voice, and eagerly pushed in, apparently very anxious to get a sight of Mr. Richard Smith

But the crowd was too great, and the matter of signing was too soon over for him to be successful.

"That's one of them; I'll swear that's one of the fellows I heard plotting in the public over the way," he said to himself. "I wish to heaven I could have seen him, so that I might know him should I happen to meet him again."

Richard Smith, who had signed articles, and, by law, was now a seaman of the Thunder, was the same individual to whom the reader has been introduced as Death's Head Dick.

The reader will not be surprised to learn, then, that his fellow conspirators were also present, and, one by one, signed articles, as also some chums of theirs, the Californians spoken of, and a few other choice scoundrels, ready for any villany where there was a share of plunder.

Royston recognised the voices of some, but was singularly

unfortunate in his endeavours to catch a sight of the men. In no case did he succeed.

He distinctly heard, however, and recognised the voices of Boston Bill and the Baltimore Buck, though he could not exactly catch the names under which they shipped.

The Thunder very soon had her full complement of men down on her articles, while, strange to say, some other vessels, whose articles were also lying open to ship crews, amongst them the Esmeralda, failed to get any.

The shipping master thought this unanimous preference for one ship, strange, if not suspicious, and hinted as much to the skipper, Captain Noah Plunkett, who entered the office just as the Thunder's articles were full.

But he was only too glad to have got a crew so quickly and easily, as he had agreed with the owners for a share in the profits of the voyage home, and, of course, the amount of these would greatly depend on the quickness of the passage, and so forth.

He was a strange-looking man, and, at first sight, few would think the terrible name he bore justly earned. It was confidently believed, among seafaring men, that Noah Plunkett had killed, one way and another, at least twelve sailors. It was known as a fact that he had shot one man who was insolent to him, from the yard-arm, and another in the main-top. For both these manslaughters he was put on his trial in the United States, but was acquitted.

It was also certain that he had "marooned" two men, putting them ashore on a desert island, with a few pounds of biscuits and a small keg of water only. Of their miserable fate there could be no doubt.

But this deed he justified on the ground that they were the ringleaders of a dangerous mutiny, and that by getting rid of them in such a manner, he struck terror to the hearts of the rest, and the lives of himself, officers, and passengers, and his ship would be saved.

But there were other and more sinister and terrible reports afloat about Captain Plunkett. It was said, and currently believed, that he had on more than one occasion taken the wheel himself, and ordered the helmsman to lower himself over the stern by a rope on pretence of doing something to



the life buoy or the stern cabin window dead lights, and that on such occasions the man was never again seen or heard of. This happened always on dark or stormy nights.

It was believed that Noah Plunkett let go or cut the rope, when of course the unfortunate victim of his malice would fall into the raging sea.

On such occasions, it was reported, he would coolly call out, "Another man at the wheel," not taking any further notice of the affair, or deigning any explanation whatever.

Noah Plunkett was a small, sparely-built man, with iron grey hair, shaggy eyebrows, and keen, cruel-looking grey eyes.

Captain Noah Plunkett wore small, close-cut whiskers, which, unlike his hair, were black as jet. His face wore an expression of dauntless resolution; but there was a hard, remorseless look about him which the most careless observer could not but notice.

No one would ever imagine, to look at Noah Plunkett, that he was a nautical man; and yet he was one of the most skillful and fearless "deep-sea" captains in the merchant service.

In plain words, Captain Plunkett would contrive that she should founder or be cast away, but so carefully and skilfully would he lay his plans, and execute them, that there could be no possibility of proof, and the insurance would be paid in due course.

Royston knew him by sight, and something of his character. Feeling, as he did, so deep an interest in the young lady, Miss Vandaleur, it is not strange that he should feel considerably uneasy at her taking passage on board the Thunder, of whose captain he had heard much evil, while among the crew he believed there were a gang of ruffians bent on seizing the ship, and most likely murdering every one else on board.

He was at a loss how to act, however. He had cautioned the young lady herself, but in vain. The only other course open to him was to put the captain on his guard; and after a good deal of deliberation he determined on this course.

The shipping office and its neighbourhood were soon

comparatively deserted. But Noah Plunkett and our friend, the young officer, still remained.

Royston having made up his mind, went up to the skipper, and addressed him :—

“ Fine day, cap’n.”

Plunkett took in the figure and face of his accoster with one keen sweeping glance.

“ It is fine enough.”

“ Roughish crew just shipped on board the Thunder.”

“ I like a roughish crew, as rough as they like, and be hanged to them for Noah Plunkett.”

“ You’ll excuse me,” pursued Royston, “ for cautioning you, but I have reason for saying that you’ve some of the biggest vagabonds that ever sailed salt water down on your articles.”

“ Very likely ; but I don’t care so that they don’t cross me.”

“ I think it likely they may give you trouble.”

“ P’raps so. I’ve had a deal o’ trouble before now with tough customers ; but as a rule they generally went under.”

“ You’ve got a deal of gold on board your ship.”

The skipper shot a keen glance at him.

“ That’s so ; and some my own spec—what of it ?”

“ A tempting prize for a gang of mutinous villains.”

“ Ya-as,” said the skipper, slowly, and again shooting a quick, eagle-like glance at the speaker. He said no more, but waited for Royston to continue.

The latter felt some embarrassment. He had overheard a conspiracy he felt certain, but could not point out a single one of the men concerned.

“ Well, look here, cap’n, it’s just this,” said Royston, bluntly, “ it’s my belief you’ve got men down on your articles who have shipped for no other purpose than to seize the ship, murder all but their own party, and get the treasure.”

“ By Jove ! if that’s a fact, there’ll be work for my telescope,” cried Plunkett, with sudden impetuosity.

“ For your telescope,” said Royston, mystified.

“ Ya-as, here it is.”

With these words he opened his long coat, and there, on

the left side, hung a leathern case, about big enough to hold a large telescope.

"This here's my telescope," said Plunkett, "and it's a wonderful good instrument, I tell you."

"Yes, sirree."

Royston was quite in a fog. He could not imagine how a mutiny was to be quelled by a telescope, nor what good that useful instrument could possibly be on such an emergency.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A FIN ON BOARD.

CAPTAIN NOAH PLUNKETT grinned and seemed to enjoy the young man's mystification much. He was a Yankee, and like most Yankees of that class had a considerable sense of humour, and could joke over the body of a man he had killed.

"You seem puzzled—kinder licked, stranger."

"I certainly don't quite see what use a telescope could be to you in case of a mutiny, unless it were to keep a bright look-out for a vessel to assist."

"I'll show you my telescope, stranger, and then you can judge."

He proceeded to unbuckle the top of the leathern case.

"Yes, you see passengers when they come aboard are generally pretty curious, and I have a fancy for carrying this little thing about with me, they worry me a bit sometimes. 'What's that you've got inside your coat, captain, in that case?' one will say; then another, 'What have you got there, Captain Plunkett; ain't it in your way that there thing a dangling agin your legs?' So I sez to 'em all alike, that's my telescope. Sometimes they want to look at it; then, sez I, it's dead agin the rules; can't be did no-how. But if ever you do see it, and it's pointed towards you, you'll know it, by Thunder!"

All this was Greek to the young officer, until Captain Noah Plunkett produced the telescope from its case.

He saw at once what it was ; a deadly weapon, a large revolver pistol, or rather small carbine. Captain Plunkett had caused it to be specially made for him according to order.

It was so long and heavy as almost to necessitate two hands to use it, though it could be fired with one. There was no handle such as pistols usually have, but it was nearly straight from end to end, and so it would fit in a straight tubular case like that of a telescope, and to the uninitiated might easily pass for one.

There were five chambers and one barrel of large bore ; each chamber held a heavy conical bullet with a good dose of powder behind it.

Royston saw it was of the best workmanship, and almost shuddered at the thought of the deadly execution such a weapon might make at anything like close quarters.

Captain Plunkett touched a spring, and out flew a glistening blade of sharp steel at the muzzle. It was double-edged, and in shape half bowie-knife, half double-edged axe, so that it could be used either to thrust or cut.

" A very pretty little plaything this here telescope of mine, ain't it, mister ? It's done good service I tell you ; I never missed a man but once in my life with it. It's a lovely rifled barrel, true as a hair. I can hit a man's head the length of the ship on a calm day. I can so, by Thunder, and I've done it."

Royston said nothing to this terrible avowal so calmly made, but handed back the telescope in grave silence. He said scarcely a word for some time, but allowed the skipper to descant to his heart's content on the merits of his deadly darling weapon.

He was the reverse of a coward, too reckless and careless of his own life, indeed, nor had he any squeamishness about taking life, if to do so were necessary and just ; but knowing the character Noah Plunkett bore of a ruthless man-slayer, it made his blood curdle to hear him talk so coolly of his deadly weapon.

There was no boast about it whatever. Noah spoke of it in the most matter-of-fact way, and this it was which was so repulsive to young Royston. To take life in the heat of

anger or strife was one thing ; to do so calmly, deliberately, and talk over it quietly afterwards, was quite another.

They talked and walked for some time, Royston being slow to recover from the sight of the deadly telescope, and the skipper's words about it. Gradually, however, the feeling wore off, and he told Plunkett what he had overheard.

"H'm don't see what's to be done, stranger, as you can't recognise any of the men."

"I might by their voices," said Royston ; "if you were to call them all aft on the quarter-deck, and make every man speak, I believe I could then point out, at least, some of the conspirators."

Noah Plunkett thought for a moment or two.

"Can't be done," he said, "they'll be most of 'em drunk when they come aboard ; some won't be able to speak, and the rest will be mutinous and obstinate. No, that won't work, Mister. It could be managed when we was out at sea. But I reckon it wouldn't suit you to go to sea with us?"

He eyed the young man keenly as he spoke.

Royston flushed up.

She was going in the ship—the proud beauty who had flouted him—Helen St. Cymon Vandaleur was her haughty name.

"I've almost engaged to go mate of the Esmeralda," he replied.

"Ah ! a nice little clipper barque. Have you got your papers with you, young feller?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind letting me look at them?"

Royston produced the certificates and discharges from every ship in which he had served—documents which all merchant officers carry.

"Good ! first-rate !" said Captain Plunkett. "Now I tell you what it is, Mister, I want a second mate ; I kinder like your style, and your papers being up to high-water-mark, you can have the berth if you like."

Royston listened, thought, and hesitated.

The offer was, in some respects, a tempting one. He would be on board with Helen Vandaleur, and would be able to requite evil with good ; watch over her safety in

return for her scornful treatment of him, and so heap coals of fire on her head.

This thought was peculiarly sweet to him. He was naturally generous and warm-hearted, and would really be glad to protect the young lady against any threatened danger. Then he was human, too, and he could not but feel what a moral triumph it would be for him, should he be the means of *again* saving her life. For he had done so once before already.

Then, on the other hand, he thought it possible she might insult him when she met him on board. Perhaps she might forfeit her passage-money in her rage, and elect to go in another vessel. Here his generous nature showed out.

"So much the better," he said to himself; "she may insult me, but if she refuses to go in the ship, her life will be safe."

Then he remembered he had all but promised the captain of the *Esmeralda* that he would ship with him as mate.

Noah Plunkett saw that the young man hesitated, and seemed doubtful what to do.

"Are you afraid?" he said; "not that I blame you if you are. You've done all I've a right to expect, and ain't nohow called out to risk your life."

"No, I am not in the least afraid," said Royston, hotly; "it was not the danger that I was thinking about——"

"What then?"

"In the first place I've almost promised the captain of the *Esmeralda*——"

"Well, you ain't quite; that's enough."

"Then I've got other reasons—other things to think of."

"What are they?"

"Entirely my own private affairs. However, I will consider your offer, and let you have an answer as soon as possible."

"When? Let it be sharp, for I mean to be off to-morrow, if I sail without a second mate at all."

"I'll let you know to-morrow morning."

"Right. I'll be at the shipping-office at ten."

By this time they had strolled down to the end of George

Street ; and turning on to the wharves, alongside which ships lay moored, had walked some quarter of a mile along by the harbour.

They now turned back together, and Noah Plunkett grew quite communicative.

"I tell you what it is ; I don't care a tinker's curse for those rowdies. I wish I only knew 'em, so that I might spot 'em. I reckon some of 'em would have the telescope pointed at 'em when they least thought of it. And it's a strange thing any one as gets in the focus of that telescope generally has bad luck."

"If it were only possible to recognise them," remarked Royston, "the best and safest plan would be to clap them in irons at once, and keep them there. The ringleaders once removed, the rest would probably be cowed."

"Well, I guess you're not far wrong there ; but I ain't afraid, not I. I'll deal with 'em, me and my telescope together. I ain't afraid of the viciousest bully rowdy out. There's only one sort of man that I object to, or that at all skeers me."

"What sort of a man's that ?" asked the young man, with some curiosity.

"A Fin—a cussed Fin !\* If ever I have a Fin aboard a ship o' mine, he's got to go. It's him or me for it."

"Well, you old fool, you'll have a chance ; for there's a Fin shipped on board the Thunder to-day. I was there when he signed articles."

Both started at the strange voice, and looking up, beheld the man from whom it came.

They were walking along close to the edge of the quay, and the yards of the vessels moored alongside of course projected over.

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\* Sailors have a most extraordinary superstition regarding Fins or Finlanders, natives of Finland. They believe they are a set of male witches, have the power of the evil eye, and always bring bad luck to ship and crew. Many most cruel murders have been committed through this belief. Fins being looked on as Jonath. As for the experience of myself, the author, I have been on board ship with several, and have found them harmless but rather stupid men.

At the yard-arm of one, immediately over their heads, an old sailor sat astride.

"Ah, ha! Cap'n Plunkett, know this coon, eh?"

"Yes, I know you, Tom Adams. Going in the Thunder?"

"May I be darned if ever I set foot on board the same ship as you again, Noah Plunkett, if I know it. Do you remember the night I was at the wheel aboard the Vixen, and you told me to go over the stern and see to the lashings of the life-buoy?"

"Yes; and you refused, left the wheel, and ran forward. It was rank mutiny. I ought to have shot you."

"It would have been rank murder if I'd gone over the stern to see to the life-buoy, and you'd have been the murderer, and you know it, Noah Plunkett."

A muttered oath escaped the captain of the Thunder.

Quick as thought, he pulled out the deadly telescope, and levelled it at Tom Adams.

"You vagabond, I'll shoot you!"

The sailor instantly threw himself flat on the yard, lying on his breast and stomach.

"Shoot and be hanged!"

Click went the lock of the revolver telescope. No report followed.

"You dursn't do it," cried the sailor, tauntingly; "you ain't at sea now. If you was to shoot, and miss, the water-police would nab you, and you'd go to gaol; if you was to shoot and kill me you'd be hanged. Yah! you murdering old hound, why don't you shoot?"

Perhaps Captain Noah Plunkett saw the force of the sailor's words. Perhaps it was as he said.

"I only meant to frighten him," he remarked, as he replaced the telescope in its case; "come along."

"Yes, you old cuss! rank murder it would have been, if I'd gone over to the life-buoy that night on board the Vixen. I know you, and you've got a Fin on board, Jabez Schraeder's his name, mark that!—a full-blooded Fin—and he's sure to drag you down to the devil."

Royston started when he heard the name mentioned.

"What name did he say?" asked Noah, eagerly, "I did not catch it."



"Jabez, Jabez something or the other," replied Royston, hurriedly; "but it doesn't matter, of course it's all non sense."

"Of course it's not all nonsense," replied the Captain of the Thunder, whose belief on that point nothing could shake; "if there's a Fin on board my ship, he'd never get round Cape Horn."

Royston almost shuddered at the terrible threat the words conveyed. Knowing his man, he could put but one interpretation on them.

Murder! nothing more nor less.

## CHAPTER IV.

### JABEZ SCHRADER, THE FIN.

ROYSTON had reason to start on hearing the name of Jabez Schrader shouted out by the man on the yard-arm. He knew Jabez Schrader had sailed in the same vessel with him; and, moreover, had done him good service, probably saved his life.

And this was how it happened; one night—there was but little wind—Royston, the second mate, had the watch, and Schrader was at the wheel. There was a considerable swell, and the ship rolled heavily. The guy of the spanker-boom parted, and the spar sweeping over to the windward with the roll, knocked the second mate right overboard.

He was a good swimmer, but the blow stunned him. Schrader threw the life-buoy, which fell close to him, but Royston had not power to grasp it. It is probable he would have drowned had not the Fin left the wheel, taken the end of a coil of rope in his hand, leaped overboard and swam to him; and then they were both got safely on board.

Naturally Royston was grateful for this act, which, at the least, was disinterested on the part of the Fin; and henceforth on board that ship he uniformly protected him and championed him.

He had met the man again in Sydney the very day before.

The poor fellow—a harmless, quiet man enough, and slightly deaf—was delighted to see him, childishly so, and begged so hard that his mate, Royston, should have a glass with him, that he accompanied him into the boarding-house, also a liquor shop, where he lodged, and swallowed a glass of fiery colonial rum.

Even then Jabez Schrader would not let him go till he had accepted from him a beautiful piece of coral which he had got in a cruise among the South Sea Islands.

It really was a beautiful piece, and valuable, moreover; but as the Fin declared that if he would not take it he would throw it on the pavement, and smash it with his heel, the young officer took it; and bearing in mind the words of Captain Plunkett, and his character, Royston felt anxious about his humble friend, and resolved to warn him not to go in the Thunder.

So soon as ever he left Captain Plunkett, he went straight to the house where Schrader lodged. He was not in at the time, but after calling several times he found him, and taking him on one side asked him whether he had shipped on board the Thunder.

On hearing that he had, he strongly urged him not to go. Schrader, however, declared that he had received his advance note, got it cashed, and spent most of the money.

Royston, strongly impressed that evil would befall him if he went on board the same ship as Plunkett, offered to make it up to him.

This the Fin refused, and asked—

“And you—you sail in de Thunder, Mr. Mate?”

“Yes, I think so; at least I am not certain.”

“Ah! and I go, too. Don’t make no mistake. I no ’fraid of Captain Plunkett. I make Captain Plunkett ’fraid of me. I drive him overboard if I like. I’m a Fin.”

Royston was puzzled at his words.

“But see here, Schrader,” he said, “he is a most desperate and cruel man, and has a great horror of Fins. He has been known to kill several men for certain, and very likely will kill you.”

“No, he not kill me.”

“Nonsense, you are not invulnerable. I don’t suppose

you pretend that a bullet through your head won't kill you though you are a Fin."

Jabez Schrader seemed buried in thought for a minute or so, as if debating the question in his own mind as to whether he would be killed by a bullet or not.

"Yes, yes," he said, presently, having settled the affair in his own mind; "he might kill me, kill me dead; my body, that's all. But then I can haunt him, and drive him overboard. All my family can come about after they are dead."

He spoke quite seriously, and Royston, though not superstitious, felt a little uneasy.

"Yes, p'raps he'll kill me. Well, never mind, I ghost him. Every man hurt me come to bad end. Every man do me kind he be fortunate. You do me kind, you be fortunate."

This prophecy was at all events cheering, and the young officer was about bidding the Fin good evening, when the latter asked him as a favour to listen to something he had to say.

Then Schrader commenced a story, recital, or whatever it might be called, about himself and his family.

To Royston's great surprise, he seriously claimed supernatural powers, the evil eye, and so forth; all which things he had put down to sailors' vulgar superstition.

The tale altogether was one to produce shuddering horrors in a listener. It was wild, fantastic, supernatural, and yet was told so earnestly and naturally that, spite of himself, the young officer was impressed, and when the Fin had finished, experienced a feeling of shuddering horror quite new to him.

Jabez Schrader would not give up going in the Thunder. He declared that he was not afraid of Captain Plunkett, and if he killed him he would still drive him overboard.

Finding it hopeless trying to persuade the simple, obstinate fellow, the young man gave it up as a bad job, and said good night.

The Fin's last words were—

"Don't you be 'fraid, Mister Mate. I not 'fraid; if he kill me, I ghost him."

## CHAPTER V.

## OUT AT SEA.

ROYSTON was at the shipping-office at sharp ten the next morning. Since the evening previous he had all but made up his mind to sail in the Thunder, and shortly after seeing Captain Plunkett, he finally decided he would, and signed articles.

He had ascertained some further particulars as to the gold the ship was to take home, and learned that beyond all doubt she had on board more than a hundred and twenty thousand ounces, worth nearly or quite half a million sterling.

Among the shippers of gold he found the following name on the manifest of cargo, which he was permitted to see, Colonel Edward St. Cymon Vandaleur, 23,000 ounces.

So, thought the young officer, not only is his daughter trusted to this richly freighted vessel, but probably his whole fortune, all the money with which he hopes to pay off mortgages, redeem the family estate, repair the house, lay out the grounds, and be once more the great man of the neighbourhood, Colonel St. Cymon Vandaleur. If fortune does not favour him he will lose at one fell swoop both daughter and wealth; knowing this, I am decided to sail in the Thunder.

A few hours after coming to this resolve, the gold ship more richly freighted than the old Spanish galleons ever were, was outside Sydney Heads at sea.

Helen Vandaleur was on board, also Royston, second mate, and so, too, was Jabez Schrader, the Fin.

There was a brisk breeze and rough sea at the very outset of the voyage, which, though nothing to a sailor, was quite sufficient to send landsmen below. And for the ladies they were all in their cabins, amongst them Helen Vandaleur, so the second mate did not come across the scornful beauty.

He knew right well that she was on board, whilst she had not the most remote idea that he was.

There was plenty to do the first afternoon to keep his mind

employed, and he had no leisure to think either about her or the conspiracy to seize the ship.

For the present there was little or no danger. It was extremely improbable that any attempt would be made until the crew had settled down and a regular plan matured.

Besides, the pirates would wish to ascertain their strength, to find out how many of those not in the secret would join them, and how many would remain neutral, and not interfere if there was a fight.

When the decks were cleared down, the anchors got on board, the chain cables stowed away, and all made snug for the night, the second mate went aft to the captain, who was on the poop, and made a suggestion to him.

"A good many of the men are drunk, captain, ten to one most of the conspirators. What do you say to sending them more grog, and then in a couple of hours' time mustering all our forces, and, well armed, making a descent on the fore-castle? We could seize all their firearms and ammunition with little opposition, I think."

The idea was worth thinking of, and Noah Plunkett gave it due consideration.

Finally he decided against it.

It was not altogether that the plan of the second mate was too risky and dangerous, but that they had no certain knowledge who were the conspirators—which latter would know instantly that they were attacked who were their enemies—that it was for them almost a struggle for life and death, and that under those circumstances they would use the arms they possessed, and make a desperate and perhaps successful resistance.

So Captain Plunkett came to the conclusion to wait, and endeavour to find out who were the intending mutineers. And this was by no means easy to do without exciting suspicion

## CHAPTER VI.

### ROYSTON RECOGNIZES DEATH'S HEAD DICK.

ON the second day after leaving Sydney, the wind, which had been blowing hard, increased to a gale.

Royston kept a vigilant look-out, but could discover nothing of the conspirators, whom he knew to be on board.

The mercury in the barometer fell steadily, and there was every prospect of a hard blow. Fortunately the wind was fair, but nevertheless the greatest vigilance and care were necessary in handling the vessel.

A heavy sea was running, and should she broach-to through carelessness in steering, or from any other cause, the deck would certainly be swept, and probably the masts go, in which case she would be little better than an unmanageable hulk, tossed on the stormy southern sea.

The second mate felt pretty confident that nothing would be attempted by the conspirators until the weather moderated. They would be cunning enough to be well aware of the value of skilful seamanship in the severe gale which raged, and which seemed likely to increase in fury before it abated.

Still, he never relaxed his vigilance, deeply anxious to obtain some clue as to who were the men who formed the gang. He had no liking for Captain Noah Plunkett. On the other hand, he felt a kind of shuddering horror of the man who, he knew, had ruthlessly slain more than one of his fellow creatures.

Nevertheless, their object was now identical—to detect and defeat the designs of the conspirators, protect the treasure and the passengers, and navigate the ship safely to her port of destination.

Henry George Royston found himself compelled to be on much more intimate terms with the captain of the Thunder than he would have cared about under different circumstances.

Noah Plunkett showed no signs of alarm. But his keen, watchful eye, and wary conduct, told that he by no means made light of the information given him by the second mate as to the piratical conversation he had overheard on shore.

Plunkett had had some experience of mutinous sailors, and was well aware of the existence of a class of ruffians who, if occasion offered, and their cupidity were excited, would emulate, if not exceed, the bloody deeds of the most infamous pirates of old.

Although he was unable to "spot" the intending mutineers, his practised eye detected the fact which to most people would have been invisible, that there was something strange about the behaviour of the crew.

After the first day, when the drunkards had slept off the drink, and all hands had turned to, to duty, he had no complaint to make of laziness or incompetence on behalf of his crew.

They worked well enough, but in a silent, sulky, suspicious manner, and Noah Plunkett observed that they did not seem to shake down and become familiar with one another, as is usually the case on board ship. There seemed to be none of what sailors call chumming together. The watches did not seem to gather together in friendly groups. They walked and talked in twos and threes, and sometimes when another would join a couple, the whole three would suddenly separate.

It was clear to the captain of the Thunder that there were two different parties in the ship, one of which was suspicious of the other; while the men of the latter party felt and knew that there was an antagonism, though probably they had no suspicion of the real truth.

From what Plunkett observed, he thought it likely that the intending mutineers were cautiously feeling their way, sounding others not in the secret, one by one, and if they appeared likely subjects, to reveal the plot and secure them as accomplices.

The night of the second day closed in, dark, dreary, and threatening. The vessel rolled heavily, and the sea, hourly getting up, roared and thundered after her. She was under

double-reefed topsails, reefed foresail, and foretopmast staysail.

The gale blew about four points on the quarter, so was quite favourable. Nevertheless, the captain looked anxiously at the threatening sky, the angry sea, and the falling barometer.

It was the second dog-watch when an event occurred of considerable importance. There was no one on the poop save the man at the wheel, and the officer of the watch, Royston, the second mate.

A drizzling rain, and the heavy labouring of the vessel had driven all the passengers to their berths. It was impossible to walk the deck, so the second mate took up his position with his back to the mizen-mast in such a manner that he could command a clear view of the vessel fore and aft, and also of the helmsman.

The captain kept putting his head up the companion-way every hour or so to note whether there was any change in the weather or direction of the wind. Presently he put on his oil-skins and sou' wester, and came on deck, joining the second mate, who moved a little so as to make room for him, and to place his back to the mizen-mast.

At times the fury of the gale lulled, only, however, to burst with renewed force on the vessel, which plunged through the seething sea wildly at the rate of at least twelve knots. During one of these lulls Noah Plunkett made some remarks to Royston, which plainly told that although he fully appreciated the violence of the storm, yet he was by no means indifferent to the other danger, from a mutiny among the crew when the gale was over.

"I'd give something to know even one of these chaps by sight. They are cunning as Satan; I know pretty near to a certainty that there is something up, but for the life of me I can't spot one single man. The longer it is brewing the worse it will be. Cuss 'em! I wish they'd show a mutinous spirit right off. I reckon I'd bring 'em to reason with my telescope."

"I agree with you, captain, there's little or nothing to fear until we get fine weather."

"See here, Mr. Mate," said the captain, addressing his



officer in a fashion common among Yankees, "you're ahead of me ; you've heard the voices of these chaps ; can't you single out one of 'em ? You must have heard 'em speak before now."

"I don't think so," replied Royston ; "you see, Captain Plunkett, it's quite possible that all the men whose voices I heard are in the first mate's watch."

"You're dead certain that you could recognise the voice of any one again if you heard it ? You ain't been and forgotten ?"

"No ; I'm sure I could tell the voice again. I always had a wonderful faculty of remembering voices. I'm certain, if I could only hear one of the men speak whose conversation I overheard in the liquor-shop opposite the shipping-office, I should know it, I——"

"Hallo ! what's that ? Who the devil's here ?" cried the captain, suddenly interrupting.

Both looked to leeward of the mizenmast, and there, gliding away close to the rail, they saw the form of a man.

Noah Plunkett sprang forward to intercept the skulking form, seemingly desirous of sneaking away without answering. Royston also followed, and the man was soon confronted by captain and second mate.

"What the blazes are you doing on the poop skulking about to leeward ? What's your name ?"

"Richard Smith, sir."

The voice was low and muffled, as though the man did not wish to speak.

The second mate started, and clutched the captain's arm.

"That's one of 'em," he said, in a voice only audible to Plunkett.

The latter did not catch the words.

"What the blazes are you doing here ?" he cried, angrily. "Answer me, or I'll heave you overboard !"

"I've just come from the wheel, sir, and was only going forward to get oilskins for me and the Fin. There's two of us at the helm, sir, the steer's so wild."

A terrible oath broke from the captain.

"Ten thousand devils ! A Fin on board and at the wheel, What's his name ?"

"Jabez Schrader, sir," replied Richard Smith, astonished at the captain's burst of rage, for he knew nothing of Noah's mortal antipathy to Finlanders.

Royston, the second mate, suddenly made for the companion way, and dived down into the cabin. He reappeared in a few moments with a light, with which he came close to the captain and the man, and held up the lantern close to the face of the latter.

"Send him forward," he said, almost dragging the captain away, "I have something to say to you."

The man gladly availed himself of the opportunity to escape.

"What the devil's up?" roared Plunkett; "a Fin on board my ship! H—ll and devils, I'll heave him overboard!"

"Listen, captain," cried Royston, bawling in his ear, for a fresh storm blast had now struck the ship. "I recognized the voice, and now I know the face of that man. He is one of them, and I think, from what I overheard, a ringleader."

"Ah!" cried Noah, his thoughts directed for the moment from the Fin. "You're sure of it?"

"Dead certain, captain. He can't escape me now. I know his voice, and I have marked his face well. He's one of the intending mutineers and murderers, and I am afraid he overheard our conversation."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FIN.

FOR a time the words of our hero took off Noah Plunkett's attention from the thoughts of a feared and hated Fin being on board the Thunder, and he proceeded eagerly to question Royston as to his certainty of the man.

The second mate had made no mistake. It was indeed one of the men he had overheard talking in the public-house opposite the shipping-office.

No other than Death's Head Dick, whose name on the ship's articles was Richard Smith. Had he overheard what

the captain and his second mate had been saying? It was important to know, for if he had heard he would be on his guard and warn his fellow conspirators, and so they would be more dangerous than ever.

There was, however, no means of ascertaining whether he had heard or not. To call the man aft and question him, would be rank folly, as he would, of course, deny the fact flatly.

They were yet debating the point—the wind having lulled for a time—when once more the storm-king swept down on the ship with renewed fury. The vessel steered very wildly, yawing four or five points each way, and there even seemed danger of her broaching to.

Glancing aft, the captain saw that there was only one man at the helm.

Richard Smith, *alias* Death's Head Dick, had not returned to his post. This confirmed Royston in his suspicion that he had been listening to the conversation between himself and the skipper. A most unpleasant thought, certainly.

"Another man at the wheel!" shouted Captain Plunkett. "Two fresh hands at the wheel! Lay off here a couple of you!"

Two sailors of the watch quickly appeared as the summons roared through the speaking-trumpet; for such was the fury of the storm that the unaided voice could not be heard half the length of the ship.

When the two fresh men got off to the wheel, the captain, apparently driven mad with rage at the sight of the unfortunate Finlander, roared out at him—

"Go for'ard, you infernal Fin, and never dare set foot on this poop again unless specially ordered! Away! go, you imp of fury! for you'd best keep out of my sight, or, by Heaven, I'll give you a lift to kingdom come!"

With these words Neah Plunkett administered a kick to the unfortunate Fin, who, being partially deaf, could not comprehend all that was said, although he knew he was being abused and sworn at by the furious face and demeanour of the skipper.

There was a good moon, whose rays, struggling through the canopy of dark clouds, gave sufficient light.

Just at that moment, too, the clouds partly dispersed from her face, and for a few seconds she could be seen as through a thick veil.

The light fell on the features of the Finlander. He said never a word, but turned his face, ghastly as that of a corpse, full on the captain.

The latter felt a shuddering horror as he encountered the cold deadly gaze of his mortal aversion. He seized an iron belaying pin from the rail, and rushing at the unfortunate Carl Schrader, would have dealt him, doubtless, a vicious blow, but the second mate interfered, and the Fin hastened to make his escape.

The skipper turned furiously on Royston.

"What the blazes do you mean by stopping me and giving that insolent vagabond a chance to get away? By Heaven, I'll have his life yet!"

Again there was a short lull in the severity of the gale, and it was possible to hear one another speak.

"See here, captain," said Royston, firmly, "I don't want to give any offence, or to do anything not consistent with my duty. But I won't see a poor devil knocked about for no fault except the accident of his being born in Finland. Besides, knowing what we do, I ask you, is it wise to let the men who are plotting our murder know that the captain and officers are quarrelling among themselves?"

This last was an unanswerable argument, so obviously sensible, that Noah Plunkett acquiesced in it.

"Well, see here, keep that Fin out o' my sight, or I'll be forced to bring the telescope to bear on him."

The captain gave a ghastly grin at this old and grim joke, but he met with no response from Royston, who was now very grave and silent. He foresaw trouble ahead, and had an instinctive feeling that before long something would happen.

No other event of importance occurred that night.

The storm raged with unabated fury, and several times the captain seriously thought of taking in all sail, and heaving her to. He kept the deck all night.

Shortly after dawn the barometer began to rise slowly, and then as the gale moderated gradually, it was apparent that the worst was over.

There was a terrible sea next day, and the ship rolled and strained fearfully. More sail was made on her to steady her, as the wind began to fall rapidly after morn. By eight bells in the afternoon the sea, too, grew smoother, as the ship ran into latitude and longitude, which the gale had not reached.

In the second dog watch the setting sun shone out, and the sky gave good ground for hope of fine weather. One by one the sea-sick and frightened passengers crawled out of their berths and made their appearance in the cabin or on deck.

From one to four o'clock Royston took a nap in his cabin, being thoroughly tired out both mentally and bodily. At eight bells he was called to relieve the mate, and keep the first dog watch till six.

The mate met him at the cabin door, gave him the course and distance, and then the young officer mounted the poop ladder and walked aft.

There was no one on the poop save the helmsman and one other person. And before he knew it he stood face to face with this latter, a young and beautiful girl—Helen St. Cymon Vandaleur!

He knew she was on board, and yet at suddenly meeting her face to face in this manner was even more embarrassed than she, who did not suspect his presence on the vessel till that moment.

For a time she said nothing, but he could see her bosom rising and falling rapidly. She seemed to pant with some painful emotion. He almost gasped for breath as he fancied she trembled with anger.

Presently she spoke in a forced harsh voice quite different from her usual dulcet accents.

"This is too much! an insult—an outrage!"

"Insult—outrage!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I repeat it. It is most abominable that I should be followed, dogged about in this manner by any such—"

"Miss Vandaleur, be careful what you say, you may repent it. What have I done?" he asked.

"Dogged me, watched me to the shipping office, and fol-

lowed me on board this ship. You warned me, Mr. Royston, not to come in this vessel."

"A true warning; would to Heaven you had taken it!"

"Had I known what I know now, I should not have sailed in the Thunder. Nothing should have induced me to do so."

"Ah!" cried Royston, hoping that at last she began to believe he had good reason for his warning, "I am glad of that."

"Are you?" she said, scornfully; "wait till I have finished. Let me tell you, sir, George Cymon Royston, Simon the Sailor I have heard you called, that had I known you would have been on board, nothing, save force, should have compelled me to be a passenger on board the Thunder. I would sooner have gone in a plague ship."

The insult was a bitter one, and as he listened and looked at the angry beauty before him, his face grew deadly pale. He merely bowed.

"I will speak to you to-morrow," he said; "I have something of importance to say."

"I decline to listen to you."

"Then I shall put it in writing; you must and shall have an explanation, how and why I shipped as second mate of the Thunder."

He bowed again, and without another word passed her, and went aft to the wheel.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE MUTINY.

THAT night Royston saw no more of Helen Vandaleur. He was deeply hurt and angered at her contemptuous and insulting treatment of him; and the thought of it did not render other things brighter.

About ten o'clock the deck was left temporarily in charge of the third mate, and a conclave was held in the cabin.

Both the second mate and captain agreed that the con-

duct of Richard Smith, whose voice the former had recognized, was such as to confirm their worst suspicions.

On the day after the incident on the poop, he had never shown up at all. Royston, who knew all the men of his watch by sight, missed him, and called the men to muster on the quarter-deck.

Smith was absent, and was reported to be sick by one of his shipmates. No remark was made, but the doctor sent to him; he, however, could make but little of the case. He said he found the man with quickened pulse, foul tongue, and apparently slightly delirious.

The captain at once put it down as a clever sham on the part of Mr. Richard Smith; and in this the second mate was inclined to agree.

That evening a conclave was held in the cabin between the captain, first mate, doctor, steward, carpenter, and boatswain, and one of the boatswain's mates, seven in all, who, with the third mate at the moment in charge of the deck, could be depended upon.

The well-grounded suspicions, which amounted almost to a certainty, as to the mutinous and piratical intentions of part of the crew, were laid before all present.

"Make no mistake," said the skipper, plainly, "it's a case of life or death. I kinder feel a spiritual instinct that there's bound to be a "muss" aboard this craft, and that we must slaughter all the vagabonds, or go under ourselves."

The news of the projected conspiracy, which, hitherto, Noah Plunkett and the second mate had kept strictly to themselves, was received at first with incredulity, then with astonishment, lastly with genuine alarm, by those who were now for the first time let into the secret of the danger in which they were placed.

It was agreed on all hands that nothing could be attempted yet awhile.

The carpenter, boatswain, and boatswain's mate, being forward, were able to give a good deal of valuable information, and it all confirmed the suspicion of foul play being intended.

Certain among the crew had been observed whispering

and talking together, but always avoiding being seen by any of the officers. The boatswain's mate had heard a fragment of a conversation between the man who called himself Smith and another. He could not understand it at the time, but now it was different. He had distinctly heard Smith say—

“Not till we're round the Horn, mate (meaning, of course, Cape Horn), not for our lives till we're round the Horn; leastwise, unless we're dead sure they smell a rat aft. And, anyhow, we must have fair weather, and be within an easy distance of land.”

“Aye,” replied the other, “but what if they do smell a rat before we get to the Horn? What then?”

“Why then it must be done at once. First settled fine weather, and when we're tolerably near land. You see, mate, it must be a boat business; ship—sunk—leak—so on—open boat—loaded—water.”

He could hear no more, save a few unconnected words, of which he could make nothing. But even so far this information was most important.

Then the carpenter had overheard the same man, Smith, tell another that there were six fresh men among the crew; two in the port, four in the starboard-watch, who could be trusted and would cast in with them. This meant that in addition to the original gang, they had enlisted at least six more.

And very likely each day added to their number. The situation was evidently desperately critical. The question now was, What should be done?”

The mate, Mr. M'Gregor, known as Black Ball Dick—a rough bully of undoubted courage and determination, and with a thorough contempt for sailors—suggested a bold rush on the fore-castle, and the capture of the ringleaders.

But there were obvious objections to this plan. Only one, or at most two, were known, and it was quite a matter of guess as to how many there were of them. There might be a dozen, or fifteen, or even twenty. And it was known that they were armed. The petty officers had again and again heard the snapping of pistol caps, and several times had seen some of the men cleaning and examining revolvers.

They did not think much of this at the time, as the prac-



tice of carrying arms was universal in Australia, California, and such like wild countries, where there is often no law but that of Judge Lynch.

The captain disapproved of the chief mate's proposal utterly. The risk would be too desperate. At the present moment, counting the third mate, there were but eight of them, and in a *mélée* in the confined fore-castle, a few lucky pistol shots, or knife stabs, might kill or wound half of them.

What then was to be done?

Noah Plunkett had a cautious plan to propose. This was for them to arm themselves, and make every possible preparation to resist a sudden attack. To get a quantity of arms ready loaded and at hand for immediate use in some safe place in the cabin. To make preparations to barricade the cabin and poop if necessary. To be constantly vigilant and watchful, and to endeavour to discover some of the ringleaders and the extent of the conspiracy, and number of the gang.

Then to find which among the crew would take part with the officers against the murderous pirates. Also to discover who amongst the male passengers could be counted on to fight, and to acquaint them cautiously with the threatened danger.

And lastly Captain Plunkett proposed that if four or five of the ringleaders could be discovered and enticed aft on some pretence, that they should be suddenly seized, and on the confession of one of their number all the others shot instantly.

"One of 'em's sure to peach to save his own life. If we could get hold of four or five of 'em, and kill 'em right out, it would scare the others. One would do no good; only drive 'em mad, most likely."

The only entrance to the cabin would then be by the companion-way on the poop, and that should be constantly guarded at night by at least two, well armed, besides the officer on deck, who would of course keep a vigilant look out, and at once give the alarm should any man be seen acting suspiciously, or coming aft without being called.

In this latter case a rattling and deadly volley was to be

poured in, and then, what with the barricades, a greater quantity of loaded arms, and other advantages possessed by the cabin party, doubtless the mutineers could be beaten off.

"As for myself," said Noah Plunkett, grimly, "my telescope shall answer to at least four dead men. I reckon if they do come they'll find it pretty hot."

After a little dissension, the plan of the skipper was finally agreed upon, and the third mate, a strapping young fellow, Dan Edwards by name, was informed, to his great surprise, of the state of affairs.

He declared he was not a bit frightened, and wished they would come that very night. So did our hero, Simon the Sailor.

The excitement and constant mental tension of the last few days had been most distressing, as well as the necessity for constant vigilance.

However, he had come on board this ship, destined to be the scene of a desperate and bloody struggle, of his own accord and free will, and had now no choice but to take his chance and fight it out with the rest: he was forced to acknowledge the prudence, caution, and wisdom of the measures proposed by the captain, and now knew that besides being a most ruthless, cruel, and determined man, he was also a prudent and skilful general, able to make the best possible use of a small force.

When the party separated, there was not one who did not feel thoroughly assured that there would be a desperate struggle.

What had been only suspicion was now conviction; and Royston, pondering over the scanty proofs they had got of the conspiracy—a little more than a few loose hints—could not help wondering at it.

It seemed as though a sort of instinct warned them all of the approaching struggle.

One thing was decided on. The ladies were to be kept in profound ignorance of their being any danger. But the second mate, pacing the deck alone that night, said to himself—

"She at least shall know of it. After the insults she has

heaped on me, I will force on her the knowledgs of how I came on board this fore-doomed ship, to fight for, and protect her from harm."

Doomed ship! He thought he heard the words repeated echo-like, and a chill shot through his heart.

Doomed ship! Was it to be so?

What would be their fate if worsted in the unexpected encounter? And what would be the fate of Helen Vandaleur? He shuddered at the thought.

## CHAPTER I.X

### BOYSTON FORCES AN EXPLANATION UPON MISS VANDALEUR.

THE knowledge which our hero, amongst others, possessed, that the rising of the mutineers, and the attempt on all their lives, would be made in fair weather, and when there was smooth sea, made him dread nervously the sight of blue sky, and the rising of the barometer.

The next day was one of those, with a pleasant seven-knot breeze from the north; every prospect of its lasting.

No show was made, but the utmost vigilance maintained. Two of the male passengers were this day let into the secret, and enrolled in the little band prepared to do battle for the ship. The boatswain's mate, too, reported from forward that he could depend on at least three seameu, good and staunch men, who in case of a mutiny would join the cabin party.

This brought the present strength up to thirteen, and as all these would be well armed and prepared how to act, the prospect would be brightened slightly.

The boatswain's mate and carpenter remained forward all day, and were very cautious not to be seen coming aft to the cabin.

It was arranged that the signal should be the blowing of a fog horn, on hearing which all who were well disposed were to join the party in the cabin and on the quarter-deck.

These would be recognized, and in order that they should

not be fired on by mistake, they were instructed to come boldly along the deck on the weather side.

Still, although these judicious arrangements were made, and the utmost vigilance exercised, the situation was a grave one—the suspense and nervous tension on behalf of the officers' party, who knew not what moment they might be attacked, was intense.

Royston could scarce catch a wink of sleep, though tired nature called for the sweet restorer.

Despite the most acute observation, nothing more could be discovered as to the intended movements of the enemy. It seemed as though, as the man Smith expressed it, they smelt a rat.

No groups were to be seen in earnest conversation about the decks. There was no whispering, no dark and sinister glances towards the after part of the vessel, no glimpse to be caught of weapons concealed about the person. Scarcely could any two men ever be discovered in conversation together on deck.

Nevertheless the boatswain's mate, John Becket, declared that frequent confabulations, secret, and managed with every caution, were carried on below in the forecabin, and sometimes, he declared, he believed some of the ringleaders met in the fore top, and there discussed their plans secure from observation, or being overheard.

This last information set the second mate thinking, and he eagerly watched for one of those meetings in the rigging, determined to be a listener if it were possible.

The men worked tolerably well without grumbling; but there was a certain gloomy feeling of restriction which a casual observer might not have noticed. It was as though each party was aware of the suspicion which existed.

Even such of the crew as were not concerned in the plot shared in this. A sort of spell or curse seemed to hang over the vessel. No boisterous noise, no loud laughter, no practical jokes, and but little grumbling. The men worked silently—sullen, as though knowing that some great catastrophe was coming.

On the evening of this fine day, Royston coming up on the poop in the second dog-watch, saw his opportunity of

speaking to Miss Vandaleur alone. There was no one else there, except the man at the wheel.

Helen was standing by the weather-mizen rigging, gazing dreamily out to sea, when he approached her.

"A few words with you, Miss Vandaleur," he said, "and then, if you choose, I will be for ever silent."

He spoke sadly and respectfully enough, and she, facing him, checked the scornful answer which rose to her lips, and replied with more civility than he had expected—

"I am at a loss to know, Mr. Royston, what you can have to say to me; I should think after what occurred the other night, after your conduct and language at the bail, that you would have understood we were to be strangers to each other."

"Conduct and language!" he cried, hotly; "I said nothing of which I am, or need be ashamed; did nothing unworthy of a gentleman."

"What! did you not presume to dictate to me? Did you not tell me that my conduct was light and frivolous? Did you not urge some absurd claim you fancied you had on me, and demand that I should cease to encourage the attentions of the Honourable Captain Fitzroy?"

"And what if I did? Had I no right to speak? Has nothing passed between us in the old happy days in England before you ever set sail for this country? before your father by a lucky speculation made his fortune?—a fortune he is likely to lose more rapidly than he came by it."

His last words were mysterious to her.

"I don't understand you, sir," she said. "Doubtless as to my father's fortune, 'the wish is father to the thought' of his losing it."

He smiled sadly, and shook his head.

"Ah, Helen," he said, "you don't know what bitter injustice you do me. But what of the old days? Ah! you are silent. Did we exchange no promises, you and I together? Have I never deserved any consideration at your hands?"

She coloured and looked confused.

"Only childish nonsense," she said, sharply. "You were a boy; a lad going to sea. I a child; a girl utterly inex-

perienced. I knew no better then. It is hard such nonsense should be thrown in my face now. And as to any claims you may have upon me for services rendered, I am sure I don't wish to be unmindful. I have no doubt Colonel Vandaleur, if I speak to him on the subject, will see that you are handsomely re——"

She never finished the sentence, for he interrupted her almost rudely.

"That will do. Silence. I do not wish to be insulted again. One moment, and I will say what I have to say."

She was silent, and stood awaiting his speech with downcast eyes—eyes which could not meet the clear frank ones of the young sailor.

No wonder he was pale and sad, and felt an aching at his heart.

The service she spoke of so lightly, was saving her life; the childish nonsense, the exchange of love promises, which on both sides were to be life lasting.

She was the first to speak. As though by a desperate effort, the words came from her jerkingly, spasmodically.

"To put an end to all such nonsense, Mr. Royston, I may tell you that—that——"

She seemed unable or reluctant to finish the sentence.

He was silent, and at last she spoke out.

"I may tell you that I am engaged to be married to Captain Fitzroy."

He neither started nor gave vent to any exclamation. But his face grew paler and paler, and with his hand he clutched the shroud he held by so hard as to leave on the tarry surface the imprint of his fingers.

"So be it," he said, quietly; "the old, old story. Now I will tell you how and why I came on board the Thunder."

He proceeded to relate to her all with which the reader is acquainted as to his accidentally gaining a knowledge of the intended mutiny.

"It was for your good, Miss Vandaleur; to watch over and protect you and your father's gold from bad men, that I shipped as second mate of the Thunder. Had danger not threatened you, I mean, I should never have thought of

sailing in this ship, but should have gone as mate of the *Esmeralda*, as I intended."

A great struggle seemed to be going on within. Her own heart told her that he was speaking the truth. But pride, perverseness, obstinacy and anger, made her loth to acknowledge she believed it.

"I don't believe it," she said, presently, in tones she vainly endeavoured to render steady. "It's all nonsense—a tale to frighten me and glorify yourself." He bowed.

"Time will show. Even now, if you use your observation, you will see that I speak truth. When you go into the cuddy, look in the inner chamber, look in the oak box behind the mizenmast; observe as you go down that the cabin doors opening on to the deck are barricaded; notice the two men who are armed watching by the companion-way; observe that firearms are everywhere concealed and laid about in the cabin so as to be instantly at hand. Notice all this, and then give an opinion.

"But in the meantime I must earnestly request of you not to mention this to any of your fellow passengers. Only two of them are in the secret. We—that is I, the captain and the other officers—think it best for the safety of the ship and all on board that nothing should be known of the affair, except by those who, like myself, are ready to risk their lives as a matter of duty."

"You need not fear my repeating your ingenious tale in—"

"Thank you; I have spoken. You can believe or disbelieve, as you choose."

She went below and noticed all that he had told her. The arms—the barricaded door—the two men watching. She felt sick and faint at heart, but her pride would not let her give way.

He asked her next morning—

"Did you observe of what I spoke to you last night?"

"I did, and am still of the same opinion. A very clever and ingenious story, no doubt, and well backed up."

He shook his head, bowed, and turned away.

Said Helen to herself—

"He does not act like a liar. I can't believe he is a liar. Oh! my heart—my heart!"

## CHAPTER X.

## THE MURDER OF THE FIN.

It was the sixth day after the departure of the Thunder from Sydney, when a terrible event occurred—an event which caused Royston fully to realise the desperate circumstances under which they lived.

The captain had taken charge of the deck while he went below to get his supper.

Nothing unusual had occurred that day, and there were symptoms of heavy weather, indeed of another gale coming on, so that as the wind rose, the apprehensions of the cabin party of immediate attack were comparatively at rest.

Helen Vandaleur was on deck, but besides her no one of the passengers, all of whom were seated round the well-spread supper-table

The wind was broad on the starboard beam, and blew in fitful gusts. A considerable cross sea was running, which each moment increased in violence.

Suddenly the voice of the captain was heard shouting out in loud and angry tones.

Finishing his supper, our hero went on deck. Before he could reach the companion stairs he heard the report of fire-arms, then a wild cry as of a wounded man. He rushed on deck just in time to behold the end of a terrible tragedy.

A man was in the very act of falling from the mizen top-sail yard. The captain stood aft by the man at the wheel, who, pale and terrified, stood looking on with a countenance full of horror

It was getting dusk, but there was light enough for Royston to recognize the man whom he saw fall from the yard-arm into the sea.

It was Carl Schrader, the unfortunate Finlander!

Captain Noah Plunkett, his deadly telescope—the revolving carbine—in hand, stood unmoved for a moment or two.

Miss Vandaleur, who at first could not realise the terrible truth, gave a scream.



"Captain Plunkett," said the second mate, sternly, "why have you shot that poor fellow? It is no less than murder."

"Nonsense, he's one of the mutineers. He threw a marlinspike at me from aloft. See, there it is sticking in the deck now."

And so, true enough, there was a marlinspike sticking with its point in the deck. If it had fallen on any person it would certainly have inflicted serious injury, perhaps have caused death.

But Royston did not believe for a moment that Schrader threw it at the captain purposely. It was doubtless an accident, and the captain, already prejudiced against the man, had chosen to interpret it as an attempt on his life, and in his blind rage produced the deadly "telescope," and shot the poor fellow then and there.

Meanwhile the report and the screams of Helen Vandaleur soon alarmed the crew.

The mate, third mate, boatswain, and others in the secret of the expected mutiny, thought it had commenced, and each ran armed to his post.

"Man overboard," shouted Royston. "Lay aft here, half-a dozen of you, and lower the starboard cutter."

Captain Plunkett was now like a raging demon.

"Back all of you!" he cried. "The first that comes on the quarter-deck without permission is a dead man!"

This kept the crew back, as did the sight of the mate and others well armed.

"Captain," cried Royston, loudly, "we must lower a boat, we can't let the man perish before our eyes. I see him still struggling with the sea."

"Now, then," continued the second mate, not waiting for permission from the captain, "lay aft here some good men and man this starboard boat."

Six men came aft, and the boat was lowered, Royston jumping in and taking command. It was a dangerous task, for there was a nasty sea running, which increased each minute.

When the boat was being lowered, our hero from the rizen rigging kept his eye on the wounded man, who still

swam and struggled hard for life. He could see his pale ghastly face plainly, and pointed him out to the captain.

The latter turned away.

"I can't bear to look at the fellow's ghastly face," he muttered; "I could almost swear I hear him shouting threats of vengeance against me."

The boat was lowered, and rowed in the direction of the drowning man.

For more than half an hour they rowed about the spot where they thought he might be. The ship had been hove to, and life-buoys thrown out, but as night closed in it became evident that the unfortunate man had perished. They returned to the ship sad and silent.

Even the would-be mutineers on board, plotting robbery and murder, felt the solemn awe which always comes on a ship's company when a man is lost overboard at sea.

Miss Vandaleur wept, and was hysterical, as were several other ladies. A deep gloom fell over the cabin as over the fore-castle.

Captain Plunkett gave his version of the affair, to the effect that as he was walking the poop, the man Schrader threw a marlinspike at him, which only missed him by an inch or two and struck the deck. Further, that he then drew a knife, and was about to throw that when he shot him.

"It's his own fault; a cussed mutinous dog of a Finlander!"

There was no means then of disproving the captain's statement. Miss Vandaleur had seen nothing till the pistol shot and the cry of the wounded man falling from the yard-arm attracted her attention.

The man at the wheel either knew nothing, or was afraid to speak, as the captain had said a few words to him on the point.

Noah Plunkett said coolly to the second mate, some time after the dreadful tragedy—

Mr. Royston, just make an entry on the log slate, date, time, latitude and longitude, to this effect—Carl Schrader, A. B. fell off the mizen topsail yard and was drowned

though a boat was lowered, and every effort made to save him."

"I shall do no such thing, Captain Plunkett," replied Royston, quietly but firmly. "I did not see the affair, so can't say anything about it."

Noah Plunkett said nothing, but there was an angry gleam in his eye, which boded ill for our friend.

## CHAPTER XI.

### ROYSTON MAKES A DISCOVERY.

GEORGE Royston, the second mate, looked on the death of poor Carl Schrader as nothing more nor less than a murder.

Still, however repugnant to him, he felt compelled to ally himself with this bloodstained man against the gang of desperadoes who had planned their destruction. There were interests at stake, and the circumstances were such as to render it almost imperative on him to keep on at least tolerable terms with the skipper.

Plunkett, though cruel and unscrupulous, was possessed of iron nerve, ruthless determination, and was the very man to quell a mutiny. He almost dispensed with sleep, never undressing, and coming on deck two or three times at least each watch.

As for Miss Vandaleur she was uneasy, unhappy even. She tried to persuade herself that Royston had spoken falsely, but an invincible feeling, a sort of instinct, told her that he had spoken truly.

Besides, there were other signs which, with his warning, could hardly fail to convince her. The captain's intense vigilance and evident anxiety. The careful watch kept in the cabin night and day by at least two armed men. The concealed, but none the less secure barricading of the cabin doors. The arms—rifles, with swords and pistols—were carefully placed where they could quickly be seized and used.

These, and many other precautions, were quite enough to

convince her that at all events danger was anticipated by those who had charge of the ship. And this being pressed upon her unwilling mind, there followed the thought—

“If it is so, he has really risked his life to protect me.”

Shame and pride struggled in her breast for mastery, but the latter prevailed. Had Royston played his cards well the game was his own at one time. She was in a penitent, forgiving mood for some time after she had been forced to admit to herself that she had been wrong. Had he spoken to her then, perchance, all might have gone well between the two young people.

But he in his way was proud also, and having been grossly insulted, resolved to stifle his passion for the fair and false Helen, and treat her with cool and studied disdain.

None the less, however, would he watch over and protect her. Scarcely anything she might do could be sufficient to quench his love, though by a strong effort of will he might repress all signs of it.

In pursuance of this resolve, he adopted a course of conduct most exasperating to the proud beauty. He ignored her presence altogether. If he passed her on the poop he looked straight before him, and did not appear to see her.

If he met her in the cabin he behaved in the same way. It was not possible for him altogether to avoid looking at her. Spite of himself, his eyes would seek her face. But if his eyes happened to meet hers, he had self command enough to stare vacantly, as though she were an utter stranger.

She felt it—felt this intense disdain—perhaps more deeply than he did her spoken insults. And all the while she could see that he was watching and wearing himself out by constant vigilance.

The secret had been well kept, but nevertheless, there was a sort of vague feeling pervading all on board that something was wrong. The passengers whom it had been thought desirable to keep in the dark had felt it. The sailors who were not in the plot had a dim feeling that something was about to happen.

This state of suspense and mental anxiety had already begun to tell upon some of the officers' party. Royston could not sleep. Noah Plunkett himself, despite his iron constitution and strong nerve, grew haggard and thin. Occasionally the second mate noticed a wild look about him, difficult to describe, but very terrible.

The captain of the Thunder would sometimes start suddenly when there was no one near him, look over his shoulder, mutter to himself, and then walk quickly away as though a ghost was behind him.

Was he going mad?

This was the question which suggested itself to Royston. If so, it would be a great calamity—for they were ill able to spare the services even of the humblest of their number.

Thus things went on, a sort of armed truce existing between the after part and fore part of the ship. Gradually it became known, not as absolute certainty, but almost amounting to as much, that there was mutiny afoot.

None of the sailors were allowed to come aft, unless specially called for, or to go to the helm, and then only one.

The cabin party ceased to exercise the same care in concealing the precautions that had been taken. Pistols were worn openly, and there was no longer any disguise about barricading the cabin. Night and day there were always four on watch, two in the cabin, two on the poop, all armed, and ready to repulse an attack. On the other hand, none of the officers ventured further forward than the mainmast.

On the seventh day after their departure from Sydney, Royston made a discovery, and was also discovered himself. The boatswain's mate had informed him that occasionally certain of the crew would creep up aloft and assemble on the fore top.

What went on there of course he could not say, as it was impossible for any one to ascend the rigging without being seen by those who were already in the top.

The shades of evening had closed over the vessel. It was indeed all but night. There was a slight breeze from the nor'-west—the sea was tolerably smooth, and the vessel was sailing at the rate of about six knots on her proper course,

There was a young moon, but a cloudy sky obscured what little light she gave.

Having occasion to go down from the poop into the waist of the vessel, the second mate's attention was suddenly attracted by the figure of a man ascending the fore shrouds. He drew back under the shadow of the break of the poop, and watched. The figure mounted to the top, and then he could see it no more.

Still he kept his post, and was shortly rewarded by seeing another man also ascending the fore-rigging—then another—and another—four in all.

He waited some time, but no more went up.

Here then was evidently one of the meetings in the top of which the boatswain's mate had spoken.

Perhaps at that very moment the mutineers were finally arranging their plans for the seizure of the ship, and murder of the party aft.

Royston thought for a time. Then he seemed resolved, and, muttering a few words to himself, went down into the cabin.

The captain was asleep, so he asked Mr. Edwards, the third mate, to take charge of the deck for a short time.

He carefully examined his revolver, and, moreover, armed himself with a sheath knife. Then he went up the mizen-rigging as far as the top-gallant cross trees.

Helen Vandaleur was on the poop, and to her the third mate remarked—

“What on earth is Mr. Royston up to I wonder. He's asked me to take the deck for a spell, and I saw him just now through his open cabin door loading his revolver afresh. He stuck a big sheath knife in his belt, too. There's nobody aloft anywhere on the mizen, is there?” he asked.

“I've been here more than half an hour, and have certainly seen no one, and I must have done so if any one came on the poop and went up the rigging.”

“Yes, and before that I know there was no one aloft, for I happened to be on deck myself, and took a look up just about dusk.”

They now watched Royston in silence, whose figure could be just made out in the gloom. They saw him go up to the

mizen top gallant cross-trees, where he stopped for a short time. Then he was seen apparently in mid-air, between the mizen and mainmasts. He was going across by the mizen topmast-stay which led into the main top. Next he was seen ascending the main topmast rigging. He stopped on reaching the main topmast yard, and then they saw him no more.

"I know," said the third mate, suddenly. "I know it now. He wishes to get to the fore part of the ship without passing along the deck."

"For what reason?" asked Helen, who, in spite of herself, felt deeply interested.

"Oh, he's got a reason, and a good reason, has our second mate. He is no fool; watchful as a lynx. It's something to do with this mutiny. Oh! I forgot, though, you're a passenger, and are to know nothing about it."

She laid her hand on his arm.

"Mr. Edwards, I know all about it, no matter how. Tell me what you think of our prospects."

"Well, young lady, I think we shall have to fight for it. That's my opinion."

They talked in low muttered tones for some time, all the while keeping a sharp look out forward and aloft.

Minutes passed. No signs of the second mate. Suddenly was heard a muffled shout. Then the sharp crack crack of pistols. Then a cry of pain or rage.

A moment or two afterwards a figure came running along the deck.

Crack! crack! More pistol shots. The struggle had evidently commenced. How would it end?

Helen flew below to her cabin.

The captain and other defenders rushed up on the poop, and in a few seconds there was a small but solid phalanx well armed and determined, ready to resist the mutineers.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE MEETING IN THE MAINTOP.

ROYSTON, as active as a young squirrel, experienced little trouble in passing along the stays from mast to mast. The difficulty and danger would commence he well knew on his reaching the fore top, where he felt certain some of the conspirators had assembled.

It was, therefore, with the utmost caution he came down the main-topmast stay, landing safely in the top without being discovered. He heard voices, but at first could not see any person. There was no one in the top—of that fact he very soon became assured.

The voices came from the yard, and the speakers were hidden from the sight of any one aft by the foremast and rigging.

Looking over the edge of the top, and keeping well behind the mast, the second mate made out four figures clustered together on the yard. They were in earnest conversation, and it is needless to say that he listened intently to gather the purport of what they said.

He soon recognised the voices of two of the men he had heard in the public-house ashore. Death's Head Dick and the Baltimore Buck were the speakers, the other two listening in silence.

"I tell you it must be done right off," said Richard Smith. "I'd bet my life that second mate suspects, if he doesn't know something. We've got tolerable weather now, and no one knows when it may come on to blow."

"We're a devil of a long way from land," replied the other.

"Well, what does a few hundred miles matter when we've got the ship, and sent all the cabin party to blazes? we can sail her near land and scuttle her, Jackson."

"Of course, our game will be, if we should ever be questioned about it, to say that the ship sprung a leak, and that



we all took to the boats. Ours will be supposed to be the only one which reached land, the rest will have been captured or foundered."

"Yes, that's all plain sailing enough, but how about navigating? Which among us is able to do it, to take her straight to land?"

"For the matter of that I think I could manage to sail her to Valparaiso, or some other South American port. But I've got a better plan."

"What is it?"

"Why, keep that cursed second mate alive, and make him navigate her where we want, and when we get in sight of land put a bullet through his head and chuck him overboard."

A pleasant and amiable proposal this for that listener, the very party concerned.

"The bloody-minded villains!" he said to himself. "It's just as well I'm aware of their kind intentions."

"How many do you reckon we can right down depend on, old Death's Head and Crossbones?"

"According to my list there's nineteen of us thorough game; then there's about a dozen waverers that will come over to our side directly some of the throat-cutting's done, and the officers and passengers overboard. Most part of the rest won't interfere, besides they're not armed. There's only about six or seven that would take sides with the after lot and fight; and as for them, we must watch our chance when they're down below, and clap on the fore scuttle, and put the bar on. Then they'll be all safe till it's over, and once we've done the job, and got the ship, we can deal with 'em easy enough."

"How?"

"Oh, there's time enough to talk of that. Reckon we shall have to leave 'em aboard, to go down with the ship when we've scuttled her. Don't think some of our chaps would fancy killing 'em out of the way at once, though that would be the safest plan, and save a deal of trouble."

To this cruel speech no reply was made, but Boston Bill said —

"You reckon, then, that there'll be thirty-one of us to

share the gold, nineteen safe and certain, and a dozen more or so that will come over."

"I don't believe as there'll be thirty to share the gold when we've got it."

"How's that?"

"Why some of us will most likely lose the number of our mess. Noah Plunkett will fight like a devil for the ship. He always carries that cussed big pistol he shot the Fin with. Make no mistake, mates, he knows how to use it."

"If we could only catch him unawares!"

"Catch a weasel asleep! I tell you he's as watchful and cunning as a devil. He suspects something, though he don't know what."

"Well, we must take our chance. Let's settle it at once. What do you say if we hear what all our chaps say? If the rest are willing, I am this very night."

"All right; let's go down and hear what they say. I don't see as we could do better than to-night; say half an hour before daybreak."

The four men now all rose, and Royston stepped quickly back, as when they got on their feet on the yard, their heads were above the level of the top, and he could be seen.

He might have escaped observation, probably would, but in stepping back he trod on a block lying loose in the top.

This, together with the motion of the ship, caused him to stumble and fall against the topmast rigging on the port side.

He seized a shroud, and so saved himself for the moment. But the next instant two of the men clambered into the top.

"The second mate, by Heavens!" exclaimed Death's Head Dick. "Now, lads, we're in for it! He's heard enough to hang us all. Down with him! There's one for his skull!"

With the words Death's Head Dick fired his pistol at the second mate. And then the other two men clambered into the top, bent on murder!

He could see their gleaming eyes by the dim light, and hear their muttered curses.

"May the Lord have mercy on me !" he ejaculated, and the next moment fell on the platform of the top, a blow on the head and hand causing him to relax his hold of the shrouds.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE MUTINY COMMENCES.

WELL might he say the Lord have mercy on me, for it seemed he was now entirely in the hands of four cruel men, whose own safety demanded his destruction.

"Now, then, knife him !" cried Death's Head Dick to Baltimore Buck, who was nearest the prostrate officer. "Don't waste any more powder, but just let him have half a foot of steel under the ribs."

Well aware of the desperate nature of the situation, Royston managed to roll over, and his hand came across a rope leading down on deck. To seize this, and swing himself out of the top, was but the work of a moment. The rope he had hold of was the fore-royal halyards, and he hastened to slide down.

An oath broke from the Baltimore Buck, who was just too late with a savage blow he aimed at him with the knife. Then crack ! crack ! went the pistols.

Still, however, the second mate continued to glide down the rope hand over hand. Suddenly Death's Head Dick drew his knife, and, with one cut, severed the rope.

Royston was at that time about twelve feet from the deck, and fell with great violence on the bulwarks. There was light enough for those in the top to see him strike, and then roll overboard.

"That's all right," said Death's Head Dick ; "he's settled ; gone overboard clean and comfortable. Now, lads, down we come. The ball's begun—the music commenced ; we can't hesitate or go back now."

Then he and the others came down on deck by the back stays. The mutineers were evidently well drilled in the part they had to play.

Although the affair was sudden and unexpected, premature, in fact, they all came rushing up, and soon a score of them were assembled on the fore part of the deck, on the port side.

The boatswain's mate, carpenter, and one or two men ran aft to join the officers in the cabin. They were pursued and fired at, but managed to get to shelter.

"Now, lads, quick's the word, and sharp's the motion. Clap on the fore scuttle, and don't let a soul come up the chains on our side."

This was soon done with but little opposition, for all those not in the secret were bewildered and terrified at this sudden outbreak. The mutineers on the other hand had been prepared for some such event.

Death's Head Dick, and others, the ringleaders, were crafty enough to know that the struggle might commence at any moment, and had carefully instructed his associates to rush on deck armed, and muster altogether the instant there was any disturbance.

So in less than five minutes after the affray began in the foretop, there was a compact phalanx of twenty men, armed with knives and pistols, ready to attack the cabin.

Death's Head Dick had all along maintained that the right plan was to make a sudden rush on the cabin, and overpower the passengers and officers at once. Accordingly he now urged on his gang with a few words—

"Now, lads, come on! Let's take the cabin with a run; pistol all who stand in the way, but don't waste shots. Strike, and sharp! Come on! Hurrah for the gold!"

A yell rang forth from the mutineers, and they at once advanced towards the cabin. Scarcely had they got to the mainmast, however, than a blue light blazed out on the break of the poop, illuminating the sky fore and aft.

They saw now by the glare several musket or rifle barrels protruded from the cabin windows; also several men standing about the mizen-mast, and crouching behind the skylight.

The defenders were better prepared than the villains had expected, and a volley from the cabin, which wounded several of them, brought them to a momentary halt.

'Come on! blaze away, lads!' shouted Death's Head Dick.

"Fire! and let's be on 'em before they can load again!"

In the space of the next minute or so thirty or forty shots were fired at the cabin and poop. But the defenders had disappeared, and the volley did no harm beyond splintering the wood-work, and boring murdering holes in the bulk-heads.

Then, excited by the rattle of the fire, and inspirited by the shouts of their leaders, the mutineers proceeded to attack the cabin. They found it securely barricaded.

Several pistol shots were fired from within, the flashes lighting up the interior of the dark cabin for a second, not long enough for the villains to take aim at those within.

Four men were now wounded seriously, and several others slightly.

It became evident to Death's Head Dick that before the cabin barricade could be destroyed or cleared away the greater part of them would be shot down by those within.

"On to the poop, lads!" cried Dick, who seemed to be the acknowledged leader. He himself gave the example, clambering up by the rail, for the ladders had been secured.

The instant he stepped on to the poop, followed by two more of his men, he was confronted by the mate and carpenter. Both fired and missed. Then the leader of the mutineers fired, and the carpenter, with a cry of pain fell to the deck. The mate was also shot in the right arm and disabled.

It seemed that the mutineers would at all events get possession of the poop. Three of them were already there, and others were clambering up.

At this critical moment the boatswain, a big, powerful man, rushed forward, and wielding a handspike, knocked down Death's Head Dick, and another mutineer.

The rest dragged them away before they could be made prisoners, and several shots were fired at the boatswain in rapid succession.

At this moment a figure quietly stepped out from behind the mizen-mast, and four shots were fired in rapid succession.

Four men staggered back wounded, and in half a minute the poop was clear of the invaders.

The figure by the mainmast stood immovable, keenly watching. After a brief space the head and shoulders of a man appeared above the break of the poop.

Noah Plunkett, for it was he, quietly raised his piece. Crack! The man fell back, shot through the body.

"Well done, telescope," said the skipper of the Thunder; "reckon you astonished some of those chaps."

By this time the defenders had, for the present, got the best of it. The mutineers were beaten off and retreated forward, taking their wounded with them.

The scene in the cabin almost beggars description. Most of the passengers had retired to their berths, the evening meal being over. The shrieks of the women, mingled with the shouts of the male passengers, the squalling of the children, the noise of the firing, and the yells of the mutineers, made up a chorus terrible to listen to.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE MUTINEERS PROPOSE TO SET FIRE TO THE SHIP.

SOME of the ladies were in their night-dresses, and by the time the first hot skirmish was over were running about the cabin screaming, wringing their hands, and making dire confusion.

The attack had come too suddenly for any warning to be given, and the first the cabin party learned of the mutiny was the whistling of bullets about their ears.

The mode of the attack was sufficient to convince all that no quarter would be given. It was a struggle for life or death.

Noah Plunkett acted with the greatest coolness, and after stationing a guard on the poop behind the mainmast and skylight, with an ample supply of loaded guns, in order to repel any fresh attack, he came below to see to the defences of the cabin.

First he ordered all the women folks into the berths at

the side, so as to be out of the line of fire on the next attack. Then he mustered the male passengers—gave them arms, and appointed a post for every man.

The helmsman, who was not of the mutinous gang, had been wounded by a chance shot, and the carpenter and one of the men were also badly shot. The former had received a bullet in the breast, and blood flowing from the mouth told that the lungs were lacerated.

The three wounded were brought down into the cabin and laid on mattresses on the floor, their groans sounding dismal enough, and increasing the terror of the unfortunate ladies.

Having satisfied himself that the cabin was well enough fortified to resist a sudden assault, the captain went on deck with the mate, and third mate, and two passengers, and proceeded to make a breastwork across the front of the poop to afford shelter from the bullets of the enemy.

This defence was formed of chairs, cases from the store-room, barrels, and, above all, feather beds and mattresses.

Lanterns were got up and hung in front of this, so that the fore part of the ship could be just distinguished, and every quarter of an hour or so a blue light was burned, the brilliant glare of which thoroughly illuminated the vessel fore and aft, below and aloft.

It was then impossible for a man to come along the deck, from forward aft, without exposing himself to the aim of those stationed in the cabin; the muzzles of their pieces protruded through the small cabin windows, nothing visible of them save, perhaps, one eye and the forehead.

The cabin was purposely dark, those below were tolerably safe, except from a chance shot. The bulkshead had been sufficiently strengthened inside by mattresses and blankets to stop the bullets, so the only danger was through the small open windows, which had been further reduced in size, and made as secure as possible.

As for the mutineers, they were slow to recover from the severe repulse they had met with. Death's Head Dick was furious, but by no means inclined to despair. He declared that sooner or later they must win the day.

The nerves of the male passengers would fail them, their

courage would soon give way, and then the defence of the ship would be left to the captain, two mates, and the other two or three who had joined them.

The leader of the mutiny knew that two if not three of the cabin party had been wounded, perhaps killed.

He had another proposal, too, of a diabolical nature. If they held out obstinately, he proposed that they should set fire to the ship between decks, as far aft as possible. The captain and officers would then be compelled to use all their exertions to get the fire under.

It was in their power to get the vessel's head to the wind, because they could take in all the forward sails. Then, despite of her rudder, she must come up in the wind, and the flames would rush aft.

This idea was opposed by several as too dangerous.

"Suppose," said the Baltimore Buck, "we set the ship on fire, and cannot put it out again, even though we smoke them out of the cabin?"

"Then we must take to the long-boat," was the reply.

"Yes, and lose the gold, and perhaps perish at sea."

"We could find time to get all the gold, which is aft in the lower hold, before the fire spread there."

"We might, or we might not, just as it happened. I reckon we ought to try and get what we want without that."

Death's Head Dick had now another proposal, a scheme of terrible treachery. This was to propose to the captain that they should be permitted to take the gold, or at all events a part of it, and embark in the long-boat, leaving the ship in charge of her captain and officers.

"The chances are that he'll take that offer," said the villain.

"Well, but what then? We must take our gold to some port. He'll make for land with the ship, get there before us, and when we arrive the news of the mutiny will be at every port in the world. A boat can't sail against a ship, you know. Directly we touched shore we should be taken and hanged."

"I've thought of that," said the leader, quietly. "I've got a plan so as the news shall never reach there."

"Let's hear it."



"Just this: if our offer is accepted we will launch the boat—get the gold agreed on—and leave the ship."

"Well, what then?"

"Why she'll founder in a quarter of an hour, and all hands—officers, passengers, and the lot must be drowned! Dead men tell no tales; and I'll take care, just before we leave, to scuttle her under the water line!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### ONE MORE SHOT.

THERE was a silence after this dreadful and cold-blooded proposal. Even those crime-stained, ruthless men, felt some compunction at the wholesale murder of captain, officers, men, women and children—every soul on board but themselves.

The mutineer leaders had not confided their intention of murdering every one on board to all their party. There were some among them who, though they did not mind robbery and a free fight, would yet have some scruples as to such a terrible crime as he proposed.

Many of them did not look so far ahead as did the crafty Dick. He knew right well that the best chance—almost the only chance—of escaping the consequences of piracy was the wholesale murder of all on board save themselves.

Some of the men who had joined him had done so reluctantly, while others held aloof altogether. True, these were unarmed, but he did not think it prudent to provoke a quarrel forward. They had taken possession of a deck-house just abaft the foremast; this was partly concealed by the long-boat, and served to conceal them all.

True, it was not bullet proof, but all shots fired from the cabin must be at random, and by crouching down they must avoid the danger entirely, as the lower part of the deck-house was sufficiently protected.

The wounded had been taken down to the lower fore-castle, where seven or eight men who refused to join the mutineers were confined.

These men, though they would not join, yet promised to abstain from any act of hostility, and in return were told that they would be put ashore uninjured with the officers and passengers at a convenient opportunity.

They had no suspicion, unhappy men, that the villain chief mutineer had foredoomed them all to destruction.

The wounded of the gang were given in charge of these men, who did the best they could for them in the close and dark crib in which they were confined. Two sentinels over the fore-castle-hatch, with loaded revolvers, kept any one from coming up to the poor wounded wretches, and the loyal among the crew were jammed up in the dark and dismal lower fore-castle.

No further attack was made that night on the cabin. It was resolved to wait till daylight, as then the defenders of the cabin, whose fire had been so deadly, could be seen, whereas at night they could not.

The gang had suffered severely; eleven in all were wounded, four severely, and at least one mortally.

The rest of the night the ship sped on her course with sails and yards untended, and the boatswain's mate, who was at the helm, had more than once to alter her course a point or two, there being no one to trim the sails to shifts of wind. Forward and aft, although no signs of life were to be seen, all was vigilance and anxious expectation.

The deck-house, where the mutineers were assembled, presented a strange spectacle. A row or so of fierce but haggard-looking men, sitting and lying on chests, or on the deck, each one armed with a knife, most also with a pistol. Muskets and cutlasses, and several axes, were strewn about, while in the centre of the dimly-lighted place were two kegs—one open, containing at the top made cartridges for the muskets, with loose powder at the bottom; the other keg held bullets of all sizes, so that every description of firearms could be fitted.

Very little was said after the brief discussion we have narrated, for all of them suffered from the reaction after the excitement of the previous struggle. And to add to the prevailing gloom, there was the probability, almost the certainty, of another bloody struggle when day should break.

There were some among them who in their inmost hearts did not at all like the affair, and who looked forward, if not with fear, certainly with great misgivings, to the next conflict.

But it was too late to retreat now. They could not withdraw themselves from the conspiracy. Blood had been shed, and all who took part in the attempt were equally responsible to the law, and the law said that the punishment of their crime was death.

So these faint-hearted ones held their tongues, and waited silent and gloomy for the dawn. Some smoked, some drank rum, of which there was a jar provided by Death's Head Dick, doubtless for the purpose of inspiring Dutch courage into his associates. Some crouched on chests, while others lay in the wooden bunks which lined three sides of the deck-house.

But not one of that gang of desperadoes slept. Thoughts of the past and fears for the future prevented that. There was no talk, no sailor chaff, no yarn spinning, all was gloomy silence, broken occasionally by a groan or cry louder than usual from the wounded down in the lower fore-castle, over the scuttle of which stood the two sentries, weary, horror-stricken, and sick at heart.

It is possible that at this time, then, the mutineers were in the worst possible spirits, with groans of their wounded sounding in their ears, the memory of the bloody repulse they had suffered fresh in their minds.

But the grey light of morning gradually came.

"There's no water," growled one of the gang, who now began to feel the pangs of thirst, after getting nearly drunk on rum; "the water-bucket's empty, Dick."

"Well," replied the ringleader, "go and fill it; you know where the cask stands, just for'ard the main hatch."

The man, grumbling and growling, took the bucket and thundered out on to the deck through the door which opened out on to the larboard side: the moment he had gone, Death's Head Dick cautiously put his head out and watched the half-drunken sailor as he staggered along towards the water-cask.

"Well, this is a pretty go," muttered Dick Smith. "I

thought I was pretty 'cute, but I am a darned fool. No water except what's in the cask on deck, and down in the tanks in the after hold. If I'd only thought of it in time we'd have got the cask for'ard here while it was dark."

"It'll take ten minutes to unlash it, part of the lashings being chain, which can't be cut. We must have that cask at any price."

"No water for'ard! what a thick-headed skull I am!"

By this time the man who had gone with the bucket had filled it by means of the dipper which hung suspended by a lanyard to the cask in the bilge, for which there was a square hole sawn out for the purpose.

Just as the man started on his return journey, Death's Head Dick saw a figure step out from behind the mizen-mast. A figure with a long coat reaching down below the knees.

In the dim morning light he saw this figure take something from under the coat, and then he called out to the man with the bucket—

"Quick, Bob, quick!"

"You be hanged," was the reply; "come and fetch it yourself if you're in such a hurry."

Death's Head Dick saw the figure raise his hands, holding something pointed towards the forward part of the deck.

"Come on, you confounded fool!" he hissed between his teeth, knowing who the figure was, and what might happen.

"All right, hoss," said the sailor, "don't you be in such a hurry. Here I am; catch hold of the bucket."

Death's Head Dick took the bucket with a snatch, and lifted it inside the deck-house.

"Holloa—you needn't—"

Crack! went the report of a pistol.

Then followed a heavy fall, and the man who brought the bucket of water lay on the deck, face down, his head just inside the door of the deck-house. He never spoke nor moved again. A bullet had struck him at the back of the skull, and of course death was instantaneous.

"I thought so," said Death's Head Dick; "the fool brought it on himself. It wouldn't matter much as far as he's concerned, but it will funk the others."

"What's the matter with Bob?" asked Boston Bill, looking over the shoulder of Dick.

"Not much," replied that worthy, coolly. "It's his own fault. I hallooed to him to come in, and he was too lazy or drunk."

"Well, is he so drunk as to lay outside there?"

"No; he's dead. Noah Plunkett's took a sight at him with his telescope, and a bullet's gone through his head."

The sun rose on the corpse of the sailor, and fear and horror reigned in the deck-house.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE MUTINY CONTINUED.

If things were not pleasant forward among the mutineers, they were scarcely more so aft in the cabin, where the sight of the wounded, and the sound of their groans, kept ever present to the minds of all a knowledge of their danger.

The female passengers, after the first paroxysm of screaming was over, became quiet, and seemed to settle down into a state of blank despair, even more terrible and dispiriting than their previous excitement and outcry.

Captain Noah Plunkett did not lay down for a minute that night, the greater part of which he spent on the poop, occasionally coming down into the cabin to see that all was safe.

It was a strange scene which the cuddy of the Thunder presented. The only light was that from a very small oil lamp, hung up abaft the mizen-mast. Firearms and cutlasses lay about on the cabin table. The barricade in front had been greatly strengthened, and roughly-cut loopholes had been made to fire through.

Two armed men kept constant watch to guard against surprise; while the ladies, unable to sleep, flitted about like ghosts to and from each other's cabins.

The wounded men (two of whom were delirious) every now and then showed the agony they suffered by their wri-

thing on the mattresses and their dismal moaning, which at times swelled to a loud cry of pain.

Helen Vandaleur preferred to remain on deck, though she had been cautioned by the captain that it was dangerous.

"Anything better than that dark, dreadful cabin," she replied. "The silent terror of the other lady passengers; their white, frightened faces, and wild eyes, fill me with horror; and then the cries of the wounded, and the smell of blood! Oh! I should faint or die if I were to stay below."

So Helen Vandaleur remained on deck all through that terrible first night.

For a time her mind was in such a state of confusion from terror and excitement, that she scarcely remembered all that had happened during the last two days.

But as the night wanes and morning approached, she thought of Royston, the second mate.

Where was he?

She had not seen him since, when, in the evening, he had gone up to the mizen topmast yard, and crossing by the stay to the mainmast, had disappeared amidst the sails and rigging.

Helen was standing behind the mizen-mast with the captain and third mate when the thought suddenly flashed across her mind that nothing had been seen of the second mate for some hours.

"Where is Mr. Royston?" she asked, laying her hand on the arm of the third mate.

"Royston, eh? I haven't seen him since this mutiny broke out. Skulking, I suppose. Have you seen him, Mr. Edwards?"

"Last I saw of him he went aloft to the mizen topsail-yard, then crossed over by the stay to the maintop, and went up by the crosstrees. Then I lost sight of him, and reckon he went over into the foretop the same way."

"What the blazes was he up to? He ain't been and joined these vagabonds, I should think."

"No, no, captain, I am sure he has not!" cried Helen, warmly. "I would stake my life on his doing his duty."

"Then he's been and got took prisoner by them. I ex-

pect they'll use him as a hostage if they ain't settled him already."

The boatswain's mate, just retired from the wheel, said—

"The second mate's overboard. When the fight first began, just before I made a run aft, I saw some one fall out of the foretop. I'm pretty certain it was Mr. Royston, though there wasn't much light."

"Did he fall overboard or inboard?" asked the captain.

"Neither, sir. He fell on the sail, and then rolled overboard."

Helen Vandaleur gave a scream of dismay at the intelligence.

"H'm! that's a pity; he was a sharp chap. Good heavens! who's that on the mizen-topsail-yard?"

The voice and look of Noah Plunkett all betokened great terror.

"See, Edwards—see! right out at the yard-arm!"

All looked aloft, and Helen thought she saw a misty figure at the yard-arm, but could not be certain.

Captain Plunkett ran aft to the wheel, pointed his big telescope pistol at the topsail yard, then ran forward to the mizen-mast, and indeed behaved as though he did not know what he was doing.

"Did you see anything on the yard-arm, lady?" he asked Miss Vandaleur.

"I fancied I saw a figure."

"It was no fancy! It was that cursed Fin I shot the other day!"

Helen looked at him with horror. Was he going mad?

The man he had shot was overboard and drowned, and yet the captain declared he saw him on the mizen-topsail-yard.

By degrees he regained his composure, but Helen noticed that there was a wildness and restlessness of the eye, and that ever and anon, as though compelled by some irresistible power, he looked aloft at the mizen-topsail-yard.

A quarter of an hour passed, and there was enough daylight to see the length of the ship.

"Stand back all of you! keep behind the mast!" cried Noah, in a hoarse whisper. "I can see one of the rascals

on the fore part of the deck. Ah! he's gone to the water-cask. Wait just a bit till I focus him with my little spy-glass here."

Noah Plunkett then deliberately stepped out from behind the mast, and took slow and steady aim.

The reader knows the result.

A flash—the whistle of a bullet—and there is a dead man lying face down just outside the deck-house.

"Thought I'd focussed him about right," remarked Captain Plunkett, coolly. "Reckon I had him just at the back of the head.

Helen shuddered.

The next moment the captain cried out—

"There he is again! there—there! the Fin! the Fin! the Fin's come aboard again!"

He looked with staring eyes, and pointed to the mizen-rigging some few yards off. Then he dropped his pistol, and ran down the companion-way absolutely screaming with terror.

The third mate, boatwain's mate and Helen, following the captain's look before he bolted, saw a figure rise slowly from the mizen chains and crawl on board.

Helen screamed, but the third mate raised and pointed a pistol he carried. The next moment his arm fell powerless by his side.

He was hit by a bullet from the deck-house.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE FIRST DEATH OF THE CABIN PARTY.

WHEN Royston fell from the rigging he struck heavily on the rail, and, rolling over, was as nearly as possible overboard. But by good fortune he managed to grasp some of the lanyards of the fore rigging, and crept into the channels between the dead eyes and the ship's side.

Bruised, half stunned, he lay quiet for hours—in the first place, because he was scarcely able to move; in the second,



for the reason that to go on deck in his crippled state would be almost certain death.

He knew full well that, although his life depended upon it, he could neither run nor make any vigorous exertion of any kind.

Where he lay concealed was right opposite to the deck-house, and so, of course, he could hear all the voices of the mutineers, although he could not gather what they said.

When day began to dawn, however, he knew that it was absolutely necessary that he should make an effort to get aft, for he was liable at any moment to be discovered should any of the mutineers happen to look over the side.

The report of Noah Plunkett's pistol, when he shot with most deadly aim the man who went for the bucket of water, warned Royston that hostilities had again commenced, and that if he would escape with his life from his present predicament he must do it at once.

At first he thought of climbing over the bulwarks and getting on board. But he was so lame and sore that he feared to risk it, especially as he could tell by the sound of the voices that the door of the deck-house was open, and so, if he should venture on deck, he must instantly be seen.

Now it happened, fortunately, that outside the vessel, beneath the channels, there was a spare spar—a topsail-yard—reaching from the fore channels to abaft the mainmast. Just as day dawned the second mate began crawling along this.

It was a dangerous proceeding in the state he was then in, although, if uninjured, it would have been easy enough. However, with great care, and not without a good deal of pain, he contrived to crawl along this, and get as far as the main channels.

From this point he crawled along the rail to the mizen rigging, and after resting a moment or two, crawled up on to the poop, little expecting the reception he would get. The captain took him for the ghost of Schrader, the murdered Fin.

The third mate raised his pistol to shoot him, but, as it happened, was himself shot in the arm by Death's Head

Dick, who had made a convenient loophole in the front part of the deck house.

Helen Vandaleur screamed, while the other one of the four who were on the poop, when he made his appearance, snatched up a handspike, and dealt him a blow, which, had it taken full effect, would have been very awkward indeed. As it fell on his shoulder, and he was knocked down. It was now nearly broad daylight. His face was bruised and covered with blood, his hands and clothes all over tar from the stays along which he had climbed—so that there was every excuse for his not being recognised.

Helen Vandaleur, however, was the first to do so, and was just in time to rush in between him and the boatswain's mate, and save the prostrate officer from another blow.

"Stop! stop!" she cried, "do not strike him—it is Mr. Royston!"

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, than a bullet whistled past, grazing her neck and fetching blood.

It was evident there was no safety, except under shelter, and the boatswain's mate having now discovered his error, they all three got behind the mizen-mast, where the third mate already was—the blood trickling from a wound in his right arm, about three inches above the elbow. The bone was not broken, but nevertheless the arm was quite powerless.

This was very unfortunate—another of their small party disabled.

In as few words as possible, Royston related his adventure, and then went below into the cabin to wash, attend to his hurts, and get a little rest. He neither spoke to nor took the slightest notice of Helen Vandaleur.

She, on her part, felt disposed to go below with him, and assist in tending his hurts, but his contemptuous manner chilled her. In turn, she felt offended and angry, and so remained on deck.

The sky was overcast, the weather inclined to be foggy, and a falling barometer; and the general appearance of the weather, betokened a breeze, perhaps a storm. Towards ten o'clock in the forenoon the wind shifted to the north-east, and it was absolutely necessary to trim the after-yards;

Noah Plunkett gave the necessary orders, and himself lent a hand.

Of course, while this was being done, it was impossible to avoid exposing themselves to the fire of the mutineers, and the result was that two of the male passengers were hit, and a bullet went through the whiskers of the boatswain's mate.

All through the day the mutineers remained in their stronghold, but kept up a harassing fire, which made it dangerous for any one to show out of shelter.

Affairs now looked serious. By evening there were no less than seven wounded men. Three cabin passengers, the mate, third mate, carpenter and boatswain, had all been hit, and Royston, the second mate, was much bruised.

About six o'clock the boatswain died. This first death cast a gloom over all. The body was hastily sewn up in canvas, and launched into the sea through the after-cabin window.

The behaviour of Noah Plunkett became more and more strange. When on the poop, he would suddenly rush off to the deck, take aim aloft, and fire his pistol. No one but himself could see anything whatever.

Just as night closed in, a council of war was held, and it was determined that a heavy fire should be opened against the deck-house. All the rifles were loaded, and two of the male passengers appointed for the duty of recharging them when fired.

Then for more than half an hour a continued fire was kept up. All the front of the deck-house was riddled and splintered by bullets, and several times a cry of pain and a volley of oaths, told that some one of the mutineers had been hit.

No attempt was made to return the fire ; and the result of this was clearly in favour of the cabin party, whose spirits rose as they saw the weakness of the enemy, and their inability to do anything. But after a bit it became evident that the mutineers had devised some plan to secure themselves against the bullets from the quarter deck ; for more than a hundred shots were fired, no effect whatever was produced after the earlier volleys.

"Stop firing," said Noah Plunkett. "It's only wasting

powder and lead. They've got some kind of a bullet-proof defence to crouch behind, that's a dead certainty."

This proved to be a fact. The mutineers, under the direction of their ghastly-looking leader, had filled chests with mattresses and hammocks; then placing one on top of the other at the front part of the deck-house, they formed a very efficient barrier against the leaden messengers sped from the cabin and poop.

There was this serious disadvantage, however, the shelter was less than breast-high, and there were not enough chests to make another tier, so that they were compelled to crouch and crawl about on their hands and knees when they moved about.

Moreover, the upper part of the deck-house was so riddled with bullets, which had gone right out at the fore part, splintering the bulk's head in such a manner, that in places daylight could be seen right through. This made it all the more dangerous to show any part of the body above the barricade of chests, as even a glimpse of a human form would be enough to take aim at.

In addition to this was the scarcity of water. The man who had been shot by Noah Plunkett had spilled nearly half the bucketful, the bringing of which had cost him his life. The rest had been quietly drunk by the mutineers, the throats of most of them being parched with thirst, from the fiery rum they had drunk.

So altogether the mutineers were not in a pleasant situation; and had the cabin party been stronger they must soon have given in. Water was an absolute necessity, and at last one of the men volunteered to crawl along the deck to the cask and get some.

This was in the middle of the day, and could not fail to be a dangerous operation. It would have been much safer when the shades of night had closed on the scene, but thirst overcame prudence, and the mutineer started on his errand. He cautiously filled one of the two tin pots he had brought with him, and had commenced to fill the other, when he was observed by the vigilant look-out from the cabin.

In order to dip the water from the cask, it was necessary for him to raise his head and shoulders above it, and so

expose himself to view. The report of firearms, and the whistle of bullets, soon convinced the other mutineers that at all events there was no lack of vigilance on the part of their antagonists; and when the man who had started for water returned with only one pot full, and bleeding from a wound in the shoulder, oaths and curses attested their sense of the danger and difficulty they would have to encounter.

Death's Head Dick fully recognised the seriousness of the situation. Water must be had—that was a certainty; and now that the enemy's attention had been called to the fact, that they must expose themselves to obtain it, a most vigilant watch would be kept on the cask, and even by night there would be great danger.

All this the ringleader knew, and more also. There was the question of food. They had biscuits, some salt fish in the forecask, and the harness cask, in which there was a considerable quantity of salt beef, stood abaft. The forecask could be got at without danger from the foreward end of the house, where he had caused a hole to be cut in the bulk's-head, so that a man could pass out forward without going on to the deck by the door at the side, and so exposing himself.

This was a wise and necessary precaution in face of the sharp look-out kept by the defenders of the cabin. The meat and fish, however, were uncooked, and it was not to be supposed that the men would be content with nothing but biscuit and water, even if they could get a supply of butter.

In the cabin they were all right in that respect, as they had all the ship's stores at command—wine, spirits, preserved meats, and other provisions, besides plenty of water, easily accessible, and, in fact, everything they could require in that way. Obviously, if it came to a long defence—a question of tiring out, or starving out—the officers and their party had immeasurably the best of it.

And yet, as things were at present, the ringleader knew that another assault was almost hopeless. The men were tired, and though savage and ferocious at their loss, the unexpected resistance they had met with, and the sufferings they already begun to experience, were not in a state to make a long and sustained attack on desperate and well-

armed men, who would have the advantage of acting upon the defensive under shelter.

Death's Head Dick set to work thinking. Something must be done, some plan hit on, both to obtain present wants, especially water, and to get possession of the ship. His naturally crafty disposition caused him to turn his thoughts on stratagem. It struck him that if he could establish a sort of truce—some conditions not damaging to themselves—they might get an opportunity of some kind.

Perhaps the after party might be taken off their guard. At all events, their position might be mended, and could not well be made worse. So he thought and thought, and gradually a sort of plan resolved itself in his mind.

"And if all else fails," he muttered, "there's the last resource—set fire to the ship."

Just as this thought passed through his mind, a noise on deck attracted his attention. A crumbling and rattling noise.

"Now, lads, in with it quick," he heard a voice say.

He looked out cautiously, and saw a small brass cannon, which had stood at a port on the larboard side, being dragged into the cuddy through the door which was thrown open for the occasion. It was only used for signalling purposes, but as there was shot for it in the cabin, both round shot and grape, it might be made a most dangerous weapon of offence or defence.

The barricade of the cabin-door had, of course, to be removed for a few moments, while the gun was being hauled in; and had the mutineers been ready and willing to stand one, perhaps two volleys, and then make a determined rush, the defenders might have been overpowered, and the ship seized.

But they were not ready, and Death's Head Dick knew it.

Scarcely had the cannon been hauled in, then a man came running up from the cabin, shouting out. He ran to the mizen rigging, and taking aim aloft fired all the barrels of his pistol. He kept shouting out, cursing and blaspheming the whole time.

Dick was too much astonished and puzzled to take advan-

tage of the opportunity to either fire or tell any of the gang to do so.

There was no living thing to be seen aloft—not even a bird.

The man was Noah Plunkett.

“Well, this licks me!” cried the mutineer. “What on earth was the skipper a-shooting at, I’d like to know?”

None could answer him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE CROW’S NEST.

DEATH’S HEAD DICK, though puzzled and also uneasy at the extraordinary behaviour of Noah Plunkett, did not let it prevent him from at once setting to work to make the best possible arrangements and preparations under the circumstances, which he did not disguise from himself were not by any means favourable.

“Look here, lads,” he said, addressing them; “here’s two things we must see to at once. One is to get water, the other is to keep a better look out. If we’d been as spry as we’d oughter have been, they couldn’t a got that ere cannon into the cabin without one or two of ’em being hit.”

“Oh, bother the cannon! it’s only a popgun—a plaything. It’s water I’m thinking of.”

“Yes, and so am I,” said the ringleader, drily. “But as to what you say of that cannon only being a bit of a popgun, all I’ve got to say is, I’d a good deal rather have it in here, or overboard, than that they should have it. However, what’s done can’t be helped; better luck next time, that’s my motto. Now, then, about this here job of the water; we must burrow aft to the tank through the cargo.”

“Tain’t no manner o’ use,” said Boston Bill; “we can’t burrow through wool bales stowed tight up to the deck.”

“Tell you they ain’t stowed up to the deck.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute. First of all, though, we must

have a good look-out—one of you on the port side, one on the starboard, must keep a watch through a hole a bullet's made, and see those chaps aft don't steal a march on us. Here, you Sam Strange and Bradley, take the first turn."

"Seems to me," said the seaman he called Strange, "that where a bullet's been before, a bullet may come again, and I don't see the force of putting my head up to be shot at."

Dick saw that the occasion was critical. He felt that he must exercise some sort of authority, or they were lost.

"That can't be helped; we must all take our chance. When my turn comes, I shan't grumble, though the bullets fly ever so thick and fast. See here, mates," he said, addressing them all in a somewhat louder voice, "it's just this—we've got to win this fight or be strung up every man Jack of us; we can't go back now; what we've done is hanging matter, that's dead sure; we must all work together, and keep some sort of discipline, or those chaps aft will beat us. Lay your life, lads, they all act under orders willing enough, and if you want to save your necks, and get the treasure, why you must do the same, that's a certainty!"

He waited a minute or two to hear the effect of this speech.

"Dick's right," muttered one; "it won't do nohow for us to be quarrelling among ourselves."

"Aye, Dick's about the mark," said another.

"I don't say that you are bound to obey *me*," pursued the ringleader, "only that you must have some one as captain. If you know any one better than me, choose him. Put it to the vote, and I'll obey him willingly, because I know that if we don't act all together, and keep discipline, we are lost men. Noah Plunkett is not the man to be merciful. It's our lives, or the lives of those chaps aft; that's just what's the matter."

On all hands there were mutterings and murmurs favourable to Death's Head Dick being acknowledged as captain, and obeyed accordingly.

That worthy leader insisted on having it put to the vote—every hand, even those of Sam Strange and Bradley, who had objected to put themselves in a place of danger, being held up for him,



The two men at once went to their designated posts, and the sway of the cadaverous ringleader was undisputed.

"And now, lads, about water? We must get to the tanks through the cargo, but that'll be a longish job. As for the present, we must do without till night."

Here there were some murmurs.

"Well, all I've got to say is, that anyone who's too thirsty to wait, can take his pannikin and help himself at the cask on deck."

In view of the death of one of their number, shot through the brain, and the wounding of another, no one seemed to care for the attempt.

"As for me," Dick went on, "I'm dry enough, but I shall put up with it till after dark."

The rest, despite their grumbling, seemed inclined to do so likewise, no one being disposed to risk a bullet from Noah Plunkett's carbine-pistol.

Four men were told off to go down the fore-hold and commence making a passage through the cargo, by dragging out cases, casks, wool, bales, or whatever was in the way, so as to reach the water-tank and other stores aft.

The chief of this gang of villains himself went down the fore-hold and started this work, which appeared likely to be a formidable job. For as far aft as the after hatches from the fore hatch, the Thunder was stowed full nearly right up to the deck.

And with a most awkward description of cargo, too—bales of wool, which had been tightly jammed in by the stevedore and his gang, with the aid of powerful machines, called "cotton screws." The cases, and so on, were more easily disposed of, and all that had to be done was to break them open, drag out the contents, when there would remain nothing but an empty shell.

The work once fairly commenced, Dick Smith came up from the hold, and, passing into the house, proceeded to make certain other arrangements for offence and defence.

The wind had gone down, and though the appearance of the sky was threatening, the sea was tolerably smooth, and the vessel was sailing steadily on her course, about east-north-east, with a brisk nor'-west breeze. This course by

no means suited the mutineers, as it would bring the Thunder in the regular track of vessels homeward-bound round Cape Horn.

At present, however, there was no help for it but to take it quietly, as there were other things of paramount importance for the mutineers to attend to—first among all, the supply of water.

The rest of the afternoon passed off tolerably quiet, a volley every now and then, fired at random from the cabin, informing the pirates that their antagonists were by no means asleep. This fire from the cabin, coming as it did at irregular intervals quite unexpectedly, though it hurt no one, all keeping carefully within shelter, yet produced a considerable moral effect. It harassed and terrified the mutineers, and kept them in a constant state of suspense. It let them know, too, that their opponents were both well armed, well supplied with ammunition, and thoroughly vigilant. Meanwhile Death's Head Dick worked away with dogged obstinacy and perseverance.

He caused four sea chests, stuffed full of bedding, and so on, and quite bullet-proof, to be dragged up on the top of the house. With these he made on the starboard side a sort of square box, within which a man might lay or crouch, and command a good view of the after part of the vessel. At the fore part he left a chink for the double purpose of vision and to protrude a musket or rifle-barrel. Unless a bullet should actually pass through this narrow chink, or loophole, the man within was quite safe.

This done, Dick chose four of the steadiest men, whom he thought good shots, and ordered them to relieve each other every two hours in the crow's nest, as he called it.

From this elevated position, a far better view could be got of the after part of the ship; the whole of the weather-side of the poop was visible, and no one could go up from the cabin without being exposed to a shot, unless he crawled up the companion-way, and, stooping low, immediately went to leeward. Even the man at the helm was exposed to the bullets of the mutineers, and after a shot or two was forced to move to leeward.

This was a serious matter for the defenders of the cabin.

Hitherto the after part of the vessel was nearly safe from the fire of the enemy, by reason of the breast-work thrown up at the back of the poop. Now, however, from the newly-constructed crow's nest, the man placed there on the watch could see over the defence, and get a steady shot at any one he saw on the poop.

Hitherto it was possible for the officers' party to work the main-yards, as the braces led right aft to that quarter. In this way the ship could be kept under tolerable control, although, of course, the fore-yards could not be trimmed, as the braces led to the waist of the ship, and either side venturing there would be exposed to the fire of the other.

Towards evening, however, the appearance of the heavens was so threatening, and the mercury in the barometer fell so steadily and so low, that it became almost a certainty there would be another heavy gale, perhaps more severe than the former one.

It was almost a certainty that the vessel must be lost if every precaution were not taken, some sails taken in, others reefed, and, in short, handled with skill and good seamanship.

The mate and third mate were both wounded, while the captain appeared so strange and wild in his manner, that our hero could only account for it by the supposition that he had been drinking. However, the situation was eminently critical, and after a brief consultation with the skipper, who seemed sullen and gloomy, Royston determined to act on his own responsibility, and take a step of a somewhat desperate nature, and certainly full of danger to himself.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A PARLEY PROPOSED.

THE leader of the mutineers that afternoon worked assiduously at getting things in order, and above all in establishing some kind of discipline. He appointed two officers under him, and got the approbation of the others to his choice.

## A PARLEY PROPOSED.

He improved the fortifications of the deck-house, and made the way out through the fore part both safe and commodious, so that it was possible to pass from the house to the fore-hatch, the fore-castle-scuttle, and even as far as the windlass, without being exposed to the fire from the cabin. He divided the men into two parties, keeping the men of one watch constantly at work down the hold, forcing a passage through the cargo, on sentinel duty, or anything else which required to be done.

Every precaution was taken against surprise. The men of the watch not actually on duty he took care should be ready for action at a moment's notice. He saw that they lay down dressed, and with their arms by their side, and lest a sudden alarm should cause confusion among them, he carefully instructed each man where he was to go, and what he was to do, on an attack or a signal from him. He carefully counted the number of his gang fit for duty on whom he could depend.

This was how affairs stood. Wounded men down the lower fore-castle—three of them probably mortally—eight, all A. B's. Davis, Corbett, Lewis, Gallagher, Miles, Muggford, Wilson, Scott. The first three reported by the two sentinels on guard over the fore scuttle to be very bad—dying indeed.

These, with the two men guarding the scuttle lest those who would not join the conspiracy, and confined below with the wounded, should attempt to force a way, made ten—who were practically lost to the gang.

Then there was the dead man still lying on the deck outside the house, having been merely rolled farther towards the bulwarks, and away from the door. And the man who had been shot in the shoulder in attempting to get two pannikins of water, was now in great pain, almost delirious, an encumbrance instead of a help. Here then were twelve men of the original gang useless for either attack or defence.

There remained a total of eighteen fit for fighting out of the original thirty, who made up the band—nine being wounded, two occupied constantly in guarding those who refused to join, and one a corpse. But even of these eighteen Death's Head Dick knew that there were some, at

least, whose hearts failed them, and who could not be depended upon to do much.

True, the cabin party were much fewer in number, and some, at least, he knew were wounded, though not exactly how many.

Of the female passengers he took no account, and not much of the men passengers, as from what he saw of them before the mutiny broke out he did not think them of much good.

He reckoned that the cabin party could not muster more than eight or nine, at the outside, to oppose to his eighteen, and perhaps not so many. So that they outnumbered them two to one—sufficient odds, one might think, for him to risk a desperate onslaught, and take the chance of having a few killed or wounded.

There was good reason, however, why he should not take this course. He had a pretty strong opinion that his men would not stomach another open attack in positions strongly fortified and resolutely defended, so resolved to bide his time.

If the worst came to the worst, Death's Head Dick had more than one desperate expedient in his cunning and cruel mind. The ringleader was, however, ill at ease. This heavy loss of nine wounded and one killed out of the original band of thirty, was an ominous fact, and not one to be got over, the attack repulsed, and a third of their whole force disabled.

Then, too, he did not like the look of the weather. He had experience enough to know that in all probability a heavy gale was brewing. The vessel was still standing to the south-east, and the farther south she got the greater the danger, as she approached the regions of almost perpetual storms off Cape Horn.

He knew as well as the captain did, that in a heavy gale she must be lost if not skilfully handled by a sufficient crew. And at present it was impossible for anything to be done, as neither defenders nor mutineers could show on deck without imminent risk of being shot by the opposite party.

As evening closed in, Death's Head Dick grew more and more uneasy. The appearance of the sky was threatening

in the extreme, and the sea had assumed a peculiar dark leaden tint, a sort of reflection of the hue of the heavy angry clouds. There was not much wind, and at times a drizzling rain fell.

He was not beguiled into a false security by the present moderate breeze, but felt only too certain that a terrible storm was brewing, and would ere long sweep down upon them.

It was three bells in the first day watch (half-past five in the evening) when the mutineers had a stroke of luck. The man on the look-out in the crow's nest was armed with an Enfield rifle, and he appeared to be a good shot. His directions were to take good aim and fire should he see any moving thing on the poop, no matter what it was, man, woman or child.

Now the man at the helm, by standing on the lee side of the wheel, was able to keep out of shot, as the mizen-mast covered him. But it happened unfortunately for him that a piece of rope-yarn, blown from aloft, got in the block of the wheel ropes on the weather side, rendering it difficult to move the helm either way.

There was no one else on deck, so the man, like a brave fellow as he was, left the helm for a moment or two, ran to the wheel-rope block, cleared it, and then hastened back. Just when he reached the wheel, however, he seized hold of the spokes to windward, and commenced heaving it round, lest the ship should come up to the wind instead of going to leeward instantly.

That two or three seconds of time was fatal to him. The flash and report of a rifle from the crow's nest was followed by the whistle of a bullet, and with a cry the unfortunate helmsman fell, shot through the upper part of the chest.

Assistance came quickly, and, without further mishap, he was carried below, while another took his place. But in less than an hour the poor fellow was a corpse.

This had some effect in reviving the drooping spirits of Death's Head Dick and his associate villains, for it was clear if they could keep on picking off the defenders of the poop and cabin one by one, they must soon be conquered, being so far inferior in numbers. And, as things were now, there

was scarcely a spot on the poop save behind the companion-hatch and mizenmast where a man could show himself with safety.

Notwithstanding this stroke of fortune, the mutineer captain was still gloomy and dispirited.

"Deck-house, ahoy there!"

The hail came from aft, and Dick recognised the voice as that of the second mate.

"Halloa!" he cried, but without putting forth his head to look, for he had a vivid remembrance of Noah Plunkett's last shot, which settled one of their best men.

"Come out one of you, and have a parley. There's only myself, unarmed. I'll come down on the quarter-deck, if one of you will meet me in the same way."

Death's Head Dick hesitated.

"Up in the crow's nest, there, is there more than one on the poop?"

"No, only one, the second mate."

"Is he armed?"

"Can't see anything."

"Well, lads," said the mutineer captain, after a brief pause, "I shall go and have a palaver. Keep a bright look-out, and if they attempt any treachery, make a rush, and either rescue me or avenge me. Baltimore Buck, I leave you in charge till I come back."

With these words, Death's Head Dick stepped boldly out on to the deck, and cried out—

"Poop ahoy there! I'm ready to meet you. Come down on to the quarter-deck."

## CHAPTER XX.

### EERA TANNER.

THE state of affairs in the cabin, though in some respects better than with the mutineers, was in other ways worse. Forward there were no terrified women always ready to scream and go into hysterics at the least alarm. This, though physically it might make no difference, morally told heavily

on the more weak-minded and faint-hearted. It is no light thing to be constantly on the watch, every nerve strung up to the utmost degree of tension, aware of imminent danger, and the probability of a desperate attack at any moment.

But when added to this there are the moans of wounded men, and the half-suppressed wailing of frightened women, wandering about like ghosts with their pale, haggard faces, and terrified eyes—then those must, indeed, be brave spirits which are not affected and cast down.

Some of the male passengers, not accustomed to scenes of danger or violence, were completely unnerved, and the second mate, who was now from various circumstances really the leader of the defenders, was forced to own to himself that in a desperate struggle they would be all but useless.

As sentinels, and to lighten the labour of the rest, they could be made available, but Royston felt sadly sure that when the real tug of war came, they would be of no account whatever, perhaps do harm by infecting others with their own panic terror.

There were five male cabin passengers, nine ladies, and seven children. These last, with the exception, perhaps, of Helen Vandaleur, who had hitherto bravely kept up, were of course so much dead weight. And as to the five men, one was an invalid, and three out of the other four were tradesmen who had emigrated to Australia as young men, and who now having achieved a competency were returning to England. Neither of the three had ever seen anything of active life, and some twenty years of money-grubbing in a city, with none of the invigorating attributes of a rougher life, had not tended to fit them bodily or mentally to face danger coolly and resolutely.

The other male passenger was a man who had made his fortune by horse-dealing and horse-breaking up in the bush of Australia. His name was Ezra Tanner, and beyond the fact that he was well to do, six feet high, his skin tanned by sun and weather to a mahogany colour, had an iron frame, and never spoke two words when one would suffice, no one knew anything about him. But that he could be depended upon in an emergency, our friend Simon the Sailor felt certain.



"I've broke the hearts and broke the spirits of a good many vicious horses in my time—buck-jumpers, bolters, and reg'lar devils, that would savage you, run at you open-mouthed, fight at you with their fere feet, and so on—and by the living jingo, I'll do my best to break the hearts of those vagabonds for'ard. Yes, mister, I've made a bit o' money by hard work, good judgment, and getting broken bones, horse-taming. All my little pile is aboard this ship, and sooner than them cut-throat villains should rob me of it, I'd help scuttle the ship and all go down together."

This was the longest speech that Ezra Tanner was ever known to make.

There were three sailors—Jennings, Walsh, and Jones—who had joined the officers on the sudden breaking out of the mutiny.

Besides these, there were the steward, cook, and carpenter, who had also cast in their lot with those defending the cabin. Then there were the boatswain, boatswain's-mate, and the third officer. But the boatswain's mate was dead from his wound, and the third mate and carpenter badly wounded, as was another sailor, Peterson by name.

Thus, then, the case stood:—Five passengers, three seamen (one slightly wounded), our hero, Simon the Sailor, steward and cook, fit for duty. Eleven in all, making with the captain twelve—but of him more by and by.

But of the five passengers the second mate rightly counted four as of little or no account, thus reducing the number of effectives to seven and the skipper.

Against these few were arranged a score of desperate men, well armed, and eager for their blood. Terrible odds, certainly, and almost enough to make the bravest despair.

Royston, the second mate, was himself hurt, but by no means so badly as to incapacitate him from leading and directing the whole.

And now as to the captain. At first he was all energy and determination, incessantly watchful, always ready with his terrible telescope-pistol and deadly aim to lessen the number of their foes, how successfully the reader already knows.

But of late a strange change had come over him. He

grew restless, and often started violently without reason. Sometimes he would give vent to a few hurried exclamations, while at others he would mutter gloomily to himself. His eyes were restless and bloodshot, his whole manner distraught and frightened, and occasionally he would glance over his shoulder as though there were some one behind him, and Jennings, one of the seamen, with superstitious awe, declared that the skipper was constantly followed about by a ghost.

Hourly his state got worse, until Royston perceived that he was useless as a commander.

"He's going mad," he said to the third mate, who, though wounded, and incapable of rendering active assistance in case of a fight, was able to lighten the burden of the constant and vigilant look-out required, by himself taking his turn.

"Going mad!" replied Mr. Edwards. "He is stark, staring mad."

"A most unfortunate thing for us," replied Royston, gravely, "and may prove absolutely disastrous. However cruel, unscrupulous, and bad a man he may be, his indomitable energy and dauntless resolution were invaluable to us."

"Aye, and to say nothing of that deadly carbine-pistol of his, which he uses with such unerring aim."

Helen Vandaleur was standing close by, and heard what passed between the two officers. Of Royston, who was nearest to her, she took no notice, but addressing herself to Mr. Edwards, said—

"Do you really think the captain is mad, sir?"

"I'm sure of it. Look at him now."

He was sitting on a camp-stool in the cabin, and kept muttering to himself and looking behind him. As they looked, he all at once started up, and cried—

"By all that's fiendish! I can't stand this; it's you or me for it. Curse you! infernal Fin, that you are!"

Then he ran up to the companion-ladder on to the deck, and they heard his rapid footfalls as he made his way aft to the helm.

Royston followed him, and Helen, though terrified, crept up on deck, also in time to witness the unaccountable conduct of the captain. They saw him, as the mutineers had

done forward, level his pistol at the topsail-yard, shouting forth threats and curses the while. He fired several times, and then ran down below again.

"Ah, ha! I had him then right through the body, the accursed Fin!"

He was rehearsing the terrible tragedy of the murder of the unfortunate Carl Schrader by himself. There could be no doubt of his having gone mad.

Presently Noah Plunkett grew calmer. These fits never lasted long, although they came often; and in the interval he seemed perfectly sane except for a certain restlessness, and haggard frightened look on his face. But even in his lucid intervals he was incapable of commanding efficiently.

All his former energy and determination seemed to have deserted him, and he sank into a state of gloomy apathy, except when the panic fits were on him, and then he was excited and restless, rushing about to and fro on deck and in the cabin, apparently in an utterly purposeless manner.

This was a great misfortune to the defenders of the cabin, not only that they were deprived of the valuable help of their captain, but from the depressing moral effect it had. One by one the little party diminished in effective number; and even Royston, the second mate, who now assumed the supreme command, began to think their case was hopeless.

Meanwhile the weather grew hourly worse—the sky more threatening; and the ominous fall of the mercury in the barometer convinced our hero that a terrible gale was brewing. To be caught unprepared in a heavy storm, would almost of a certainty prove fatal to the ship.

And yet how was it possible to reef the topsails, take in the courses, trim the yards, get ready storm-sails, and such like, when it was impossible for any one to appear on deck without becoming a mark for the bullets of the mutineers?

At the moment there was not more wind than the vessel could stand; but the heavy laden appearance of the sky, the dense banks of clouds to the southward, the dark ombre hue of the sea, and the falling barometer, told him of a furious gale.

Miss Vandaleur closely watched the countenance of Royston who now had undisputed command, as the captain did

not attempt to interfere in any way. Accustomed to read his thoughts in his face when they were both happy children together, what she saw did not reassure her. There was an uneasy, though determined look in his face, and his manner was restless and nervous.

The close, gloomy cabin, by no means enlivened by the faint groans of the wounded, and the stifled cries and sobs of the female passengers, was more than she could stand. So she managed to make a sort of shelter for herself behind the mizenmast, out of sight of the deck-house. Some old canvas formed the basis of the nest she had constructed.

When, however, Royston saw what she had done, he contrived to watch his opportunity when she was below, and, unseen by her, dragged a tarpaulin along, and threw it down on the canvas.

She did not know who had done her this service, though she could but guess, and trying to persuade herself that it had been thrown by chance where she found it, proceeded to take advantage of it, and made a very tolerable shelter from wind and rain.

Notwithstanding the perilous position in which they were, the coldness, or rather estrangement, between Helen and her one time lover continued.

To say that her heart was not drawn to him in spite of herself would be untrue. Nevertheless, her false pride prevailed, and sufficed to prevent his making any approach whatever. She witnessed his exertions on all their behalf, saw that he scarcely ever slept, and that he exposed himself to danger without hesitation when necessary, though he was by no means foolhardy or rash.

He knew that in default of the captain the safety of the vessel, of the helpless women and others, depended on his prudence and energy.

Towards evening the wind fell light, and the sea being tolerably smooth, the vessel glided along quietly enough. The wind was from the nor-west, and on the port quarter, the vessel steering about sou-nor-east.

Royston was standing abaft the mizenmast, leaning on the spanker boom, and looking anxiously out to the southward, whence the heavy banks of clouds, and threatening

appearance of the sky, told that the storm would come. Miss Vandaleur was crouching close behind the mast in her improvised canvas and tarpaulin house. Presently Royston was joined by Ezra Tanner, the only one among the passengers who was worth anything in this time of peril.

"You don't seem to like the look of the weather, Mr. Royston," he said.

"I don't, indeed. It will blow a hurricane before another sun rises."

"That's bad, very bad. We've got trouble enough to keep those devils at bay without having to fight against winds and waves."

"Bad!—it's ruin! it's destruction to us! It's as near as impossible as can be for any ship to weather such a gale as I know is coming with all this canvas, and things at sixes and sevens."

"Ain't it possible to take in some of the sails?"

"It would be if it wasn't for those murdering villains forward. As it is, how can we show on deck, out of cover, let alone go aloft. Why, if we attempted such a thing, we should very soon be shot down."

"Then what's to be done, eh? Make a rush forward with all our force, and trust to surprise to give us victory?"

"I've thought of that, but concluded that it was impossible to succeed. There's only about seven or eight of us worth anything in a desperate struggle, and they must have at least above a score. Besides, you may depend on it they've barricaded themselves pretty securely, and keep a good look-out."

"Well, it seems to me as things are coming to a *crysalis*—we've got the choice of being shot or drowned, and that's all."

Royston said nothing, but appeared to be deeply buried in thought.

"I say, mister, do you think them chaps for'ard has got sense enough to know that we're going to have a storm?"

"I don't believe they do, and I've been thinking for some time on what might give us a chance, though there's great danger attached to it."

"Well, mister, what's your plan?"

"To call a parley between me and their ringleader, and explaining to them the state of affairs, propose an armistice while all hands got the ship snug, and prepared to stand the coming gale. Just hearken to the moaning of the wind afar off, in these regions a sure sign of a violent storm."

They listened to the dismal sound for some time, and then the second mate suddenly spoke :—

"Yes, I'll do it. I'll risk it, though I perish."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Go boldly out on the quarter-deck, unarmed, and ask their leader to come out also that we may have a talk."

"Desperate—dangerous, mister. Suppose their answer's a volley of bullets?"

"Then I shall fall, that's all. Anyhow I have made up my mind. Go you and get all hands together at the front of the cabin, where, behind the barricade, they may be prepared to protect me by their rifles, or avenge my death."

"You mean to go right down on deck, the open deck, out of all shelter?"

"Frequently the boldest is ultimately the safest course. At all events I mean to chance it. Something must be done, that's certain. If I fall, my friend, then you'll be one the fewer, and of course your hope of ultimate victory will be so much lessened."

"Knocked on the head altogether, I reckon," remarked Ezra. "But since you've made up your mind, I'll go and see things right in the cabin. Good luck go with you."

"Farewell, my friend," replied Royston, sadly; "I must own I don't see my way out of this."

Ezra Tanner went below, and the second mate and Miss Vandaleur were alone on the poop, within a few feet of each other.

But happening to unexpectedly look towards her, he caught her eyes earnestly fixed on his face.

The look was unmistakably one of tender sorrow, and at once Royston's heart bounded within him and yearned towards her. She coloured up at being thus caught, and turned away her gaze. Royston stepped forward and addressed her—

"Dearest Helen!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

## ROYSTON ON THE QUARTER DECK.

Nothing could have been more injudicious on his part than this sudden and warm manner of addressing her. She was angry, and ashamed of being detected gazing at him, and the hot blood flew to her face as she heard what she considered his audacious words.

Miss Vandaleur's pride was aroused, and half rising from her crouching position, she again looked him full in the face, but this time with a very different expression in her beautiful features.

"Mr. Royston," she exclaimed hastily, "I know not by what right you dare to address me thus. Please to remember who I am and who you are, and our respective positions."

Royston was chilled in a moment, and then came a fierce burst of anger.

"Oh, yes," he cried, "I know full well who you are—a false-hearted jilt! I know who you are! you will be the Honourable Mrs. Fitzroy some day—a peeress, perhaps! I know who you are, and who I am—a common sailor, or at least only a paltry merchant officer! I know who I am, and what I have endured for you—risked life itself to shield you from harm; and for what a return—scorn and insult! I know you, my Lady Helen! and henceforth I will meet scorn with scorn! Traitor, I hate and despise you!"

She could scarcely speak for rage. Never before had she been thus talked to.

"I will not stay to listen to your insolent language. Were my father here you would not dare thus to insult me!"

She rose, and gathering the skirt of her dress around her with an angry snatch, moved towards the companion-way, almost too excited to avoid exposing herself to the fire of the mutineers.

"Stay, Helen, stay! I insist upon it!" he cried, bounding forward, and seizing her wrist.

"Leave go my wrist, sir! how dare you! I will call for help!" she cried, panting with anger.

"Stay one moment and watch me. I shall, perchance, afford you a sight which will gladden your cruel eyes."

"I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Wait and see," was his reply; and she remained spell-bound, her eyes following him as he walked boldly to the break of the poop. "You may possibly have the pleasure of witnessing my death," he added, bitterly. "I am going down into the waist in full view of the enemy."

Then he sprang down from the poop on to the quarter-deck. A cry escaped her, and she clasped her hands together wildly.

"Great heavens! he is about to throw his life away, and for me! Audacious and insolent that he is, I would my tongue had been cut out ere I had driven him to this!"

It was a time of terrible suspense, the few minutes or so between his bold descent from the poop to the quarter-deck and the appearance of Death's Head Dick from the deck-house in response to his proposal for a parley.

She knew by the manner of the two when they met that there was no immediate danger, and, overcome by tumultuous emotion, tottered back to her nest behind the mizen-mast, and, throwing herself on the old canvas, burst into a flood of tears.

Such is woman. At one moment scorning, insulting, reproaching—at the next, weeping, full of remorse and tenderness.

Simon the Sailor thought it best to carry off things with a high hand in dealing with the chief of the mutineers.

Death's Head Dick approached in a sneaking, suspicious manner, glancing furtively around, as though fearing an ambuscade or hostile meeting of some kind. His eyes could not stand the keen steady look of the second mate.

"Oh, don't be frightened, Mr. Richard Smith, no harm shall befall you now. Indeed, it would be a pity that you should be shot at all, and so rob the gallows of its due, and the hangman of his fee."

This bold speech from the representative of the weaker party had its effect.

"He ain't down on his luck, anyhow; he don't seem to be afraid of the result. If all you called a parley for was



to slang me, we might as well go back and fight it out," he audibly added.

"No, that isn't all. First, however, what do you and your scoundrel companions want?"

"Not much," replied Dick, with a grin, "only the ship and the gold."

"You will have neither, take my word for it. We are well armed, quite prepared for you, and at any moment a vessel may heave in sight, when of course you will be easily overpowered."

"We'll take our chance of that," growled the mutineer.

"I advise you to give up your mad, wicked, and hopeless attempt. Come aft unarmed, and by so doing earn the clemency of the laws human and divine which you have outraged."

"Not if I know it! I tell you again we mean to have the ship and the gold. If you'll give 'em up quietly, we'll spare all your lives, and put you into the long-boat near some port so that you may easily get ashore."

"Certainly not! We are quite able to defend the vessel and the gold, and mean to do so to the last."

"And we mean to have both, so make no mistake, Mr. Second-Mate. Have you got anything more to say?"

"Yes; a terrible storm is coming on, of that there is no doubt. If we are caught in it in our present trim the vessel's almost sure to go down."

"Well?"

"I propose, then, that there should be an armistice, a truce for a time, and that all hands should turn to reef top-sails, take in other sails, and make her snug."

"There's some truth in what you say. I do believe we're going to have a bit of a blow."

"We shall have one of the heaviest gales ever known even in these storm-swept seas."

"Well, but look here, mister—how shall we be sure that you won't try and play us a trick, be up to some hanky-panky or other? We're all right in the deck-house, where your bullets can't hurt us, but if we come on deck it might be different."

"We shall run the same risk. We are all safe from your

bullets in the cabin, but if we come from our shelter we also shall necessarily expose ourselves. You can take your precautions, and, as far as we are concerned, I will pledge my word that you shall not be molested."

Death's Head Dick looked doubtful, but was evidently anxious to make some arrangement.

"Well, how do you propose to work?"

"Just this way. We will take care of the steering, the main and maintopsail braces which lead aft, and will reef the mizen topsail; and, in fact, do all that is necessary aft. You reef and furl the sails on the fore and mainmasts, and trim the yards, and make all taut. That's simple enough, ain't it?"

"Yes, it seems fair and square enough," replied Smith.

Then he hung down his head for a moment or two, and seemed to be debating with himself.

"Look here, Mister, I think pretty fair o' what you say. I'll talk to my mates about it. But there's one thing first."

"What's that?"

"Will you let us come to that water-cask without firing?"

"Ah! You are short of water," cried the second mate, a flash of joy lighting up his face.

"Oh, don't you be so cock-a-whoop! It's only for a short time. We shall have plenty to-morrow morning."

He meant by means of the tunnel some of them were at work on night and day boring a hole through the cargo to get at the water aft.

Royston, however, did not know of this, and thought it was mere bravado. He felt loath to promise them access to the water-cask without being fired on. It was giving up a powerful weapon, a terrible ally, thirst.

"If you don't choose to do that, you and your proposal may go."

A light drizzling rain was falling, and just at this moment a sudden gust of wind broke on the ship, whistling and moaning most ominously through the rigging. Our hero felt certain that there was no time to be lost, as the gale would soon be on them, and it was desirable to get the ship snug during daylight.

"I consent for this evening only, on these conditions;—

every man to come to the cask with his pannikin and drink, but no buckets to be filled."

"Very well, it's a bargain. I'll talk to my mates. The truce begins now?"

"The truce begins now," replied the second mate, "and lasts till all lies snug."

"Then here goes for a drink," cried the mutineer; and going to the cask, he drew a dipper of water, and eagerly gulped it down. Then another and another.

"Water! water!" he heard shouted from the forecastle.

"Come in out of that, Dick, and bring us some water."

"All right, lads, you shall have plenty of water."

"One at a time, mind," cried Royston. "Any infringement of the conditions and we'll fire on you!"

"Aye, aye," replied Smith. "I'll explain it to them."

The second mate walked slowly aft, well satisfied with the result of what seemed a very hazardous enterprise. Just as he got abreast the after hatch, he heard a strange uproar in the cabin. The trampling of feet, cries and shouts which he could not understand. He recognised the voice, however.

"By heavens! it's the captain," he cried. "What can have happened now?"

He hastily swung himself on to the poop, and went down into the cabin.

A strange, a terrible sight, met his eyes.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### PUT THAT GHOST IN IRONS.

THE women were all huddled together in the after part of the cabin, evidently in a state of great alarm. Just as he descended they all scattered like a flock of frightened sheep and ran forward, some of them screaming. The cause of their terror was apparent at once.

Captain Noah Plunkett, in his shirt and trousers only, and carrying his one deadly telescope in his hand, had just made a rush from the fore part of the cabin aft. His appearance

was quite enough to cause alarm to even a tolerably strong-nerved person.

His face was ghastly pale, and the features distorted by powerful emotions—rage or terror, or both combined. His short bristly hair seemed to stand straight up ; his eyes were bloodshot, his beard wet with perspiration.

“ Mad—stark, staring mad !” ejaculated Royston. “ He must be restrained, or he will do himself an injury.”

Meanwhile he kept turning to and fro in the cabin, now presenting his carbine-pistol, and charging some imaginary foe—now retreating in panic and terror, and shouting and yelling all the time—

“ Curse you ! get out of my sight, you d—d Fin ! Clear out of that, or by Heaven I’ll shoot you !”

With this he levelled his pistol and fired, the bullet whistling through the cabin and burying itself in one of the beams, passing within a foot or two of the ladies’ heads. This caused a fresh access of screaming, and another rush forward of the frightened females. Even the men looked scared and bewildered.

The captain in his present state was desperately dangerous, but no one seemed prepared to take any steps.

“ Ah, confound you !” yelled Noah Plunkett, “ can’t I hurt you ? My bullet went through you ; you’re bullet-proof, you Fin !”

Then with a sudden yell of terror he darted from the after part of the cabin right forward, sending the unhappy ladies flying away aft again in the utmost terror.

The affair was now getting serious. Even the sentries could not keep their attention fixed on their duties, a madman rushing about with a loaded pistol all the while. The uproar, too, could be heard forward in the deck-house, and the mutineers would know that there was something wrong.

True, a truce had been agreed on, but Simon the Sailor was not so foolishly credulous as to trust to the honour of the mutineer chief, whose deliberate purpose it was to murder every soul on board except his own gang.

The second mate—now in undisputed command—was just about to take measures for securing the captain and con-

fining him by force, when the latter suddenly bounded up the companion-way on to the poop.

Royston followed, greatly disquieted, and with a vague feeling that something dreadful was about to happen.

Noah Plunkett raced up and down the poop in the same way as he had in the cabin, only he seemed more violent and excited than ever. His curses were terrible, and in the bluish grey evening light, his white face, black beard, and gleaming bloodshot eyes, looked very terrible.

Helen Vandaleur, who was in her nest immediately behind the mizenmast, gave a slight scream of terror as this dreadful cadaverous looking object came running towards her. Almost instantly, however, he ran aft again, shouting and yelling—

“Leave me—leave my ship—get out of my ship—get out of my sight, you Fin!”

Then followed a volley of oaths too dreadful to relate.

“You won’t, won’t you! then confound you, I’ll shoot you!”

Quick as thought he levelled and fired his piece twice, and pulled the trigger a third time. There were but two reports, however, and Royston felt glad to know that all the barrels were now discharged.

“Ah! you’re bullet-proof, are you! Take that, then!”

With that he hurled the heavy carbine-pistol—the one-time deadly telescope—at some object only visible to himself.

“No use! no use!” he shrieked. “Bullet-proof—proof against everything! Keep off! keep away from me, I tell you! Curse you, will you keep away? Keep away! go back to where you came from! Ah, you wretch!”

Then Noah Plunkett, at one time so strong-nerved and fearless, gave vent to a piercing scream, and started back several yards. His face was towards the stern of the vessel, and his eyes fixed in a horrified stare on some object he appeared to see between himself and the taffrail. His face was of a ghastly, bluish white, his bloodshot eyes seemed as if about to start from his head, his whole frame convulsed and shaken with terror. Step by step he retreated backwards, all the while talking, yelling and shouting.

"Keep back, you accursed ghost! Keep away from me, I say!"

All who witnessed this scene were stricken with horror, so terrible were the appearance, curses, and piercing yells of Noah Plunkett.

Helen Vandaleur hid the horrid sight from her by placing her hands before her eyes, while Royston and others looked on spell-bound. Several of the mutineers forward, too, attracted by the screams and oaths of the captain, had clambered up on the deck-house, so as to command a good view of the scene being enacted on the poop.

All at once Noah Plunkett sprang into the mizen-rigging, and began ascending the ratlines

"Mr. Royston," he cried, his eye falling on the second mate, "stop that fellow coming up the rigging after me! Don't you see he's going to follow me? Stop him, I say! Do you hear me, sir? Will you obey orders? Stop him, stop——"

"Who am I to stop, sir?"

"That cursed Fiin!—that cursed ghost! Don't you see he's going to come after me? Stop him, I say, stop him!" yelled Noah Plunkett.

He went up a few ratlines higher, then stopped, and again shouted to Royston.

"Mr. Royston, will you do as I order you?" he shrieked. "Look, he's going into the rigging! Put that accursed ghost in irons, I order you!"

There was something horribly grotesque in the idea of putting the handcuffs on a ghost, and but for the terrible surroundings of the scene, the captain's last order might well have provoked mirth. As it was, no one felt in the least inclined to laugh. A sort of shuddering fear was on all who witnessed the doings and heard the words of the captain.

The more superstitious fully believed that Noah was really haunted by the ghost of the murdered Carl Schrader, and one went so far as to say that he could see a misty form standing by the mizen rigging.

Slowly the captain went up the ratlines, stopping every now and then to shout and blaspheme.

He ascended to the mizentop, and stood there holding by one of the topmast shrouds, and looking over the edge of the top, staring with an expression of frantic terror on his ghastly face at the mizen-rigging beneath him.

"Stop him, Mr. Royston! stop him, I order you! stop that accursed Fin!"

After remaining thus for a moment or two, all the while yelling out curses and threats, he suddenly started into the topmast rigging, and ran up the ratlines to the topsail-yard. Here he again paused for a minute or so. Then with a yell of terror he got on to the foot-rope, and commenced making his way out on the yard.

When he got to the yard-arm he turned half round, and looked down into the mizen-top. Again he shrieked aloud, and shouted to the second mate—

"Stop that accursed Fin, I tell you! He's coming up the topmast rigging after me!"

All hands forward and aft were now horrified spectators of the scene. The sailors, always superstitious, fully believed that the ghost of the murdered Fin was pursuing the captain. Even Royston, who was by no means disposed to believe in the supernatural, felt a sort of vague terror as he saw the glaring eyes of the captain earnestly fixed on the mizen top, and heard him address some one there invisible to all but himself.

The steward, coming to the companion-way, touched our hero on the shoulder.

"More bad news, sir."

"What is it?"

"The chief mate's dead. His last words were—'Doomed ship—all hands perish!'"

"Poor fellow! I feared he would not get over it. Whatever you do, steward, don't mention his last words to any one."

Sailors firmly believe that the last words of a dying man are prophetic, and the defenders of the cabin had already enough to depress them, without the ominous last words of the mate to deepen their gloom.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A MADMAN'S LEAP FROM THE YARD-ARM.

RICHARD SMITH, when he went back to the deck-house, after the talk with the second mate, and slaking his own thirst at the water-cask, proceeded to lay before his fellow pirates the proposal made.

The permission to get water unmolested was what pleased all most at the time, and he found it impossible to go into the other matter until they had all slaked their thirst. Indeed he found it a difficult matter to keep the sentries over the fore-castle at their posts, and a more difficult task to prevent half a dozen or so rushing out of the deck-house, and crowding round the cask all together.

It was only by shouting into their ears, that if more than one at a time went to the cask they would be fired on from the cabin, that he could induce them to curb their impatience. As it was, there was much wrangling as to who should go first, and in several cases it nearly came to a fight.

However, in the course of a few minutes every man had slaked his thirst, and brought a pannikin of water away with him. Death's Head Dick now at once proceeded in very few words to explain and give his opinion on the proposal of the second mate.

"It's just this, lads. The second mate says there's going to be a big blow, a regular snorter, and I'm inclined to believe him, for I never see the sky look more angersome than it does this evening. Well, he says if we're caught in a heavy gale with this canvas on her, yards unarmed, and at sixes and sevens, she'll be sure to go to the bottom with all hands, gold, and everything. He proposes what the sodgers call an armistice, and that all hands, for'ard and aft, help reef and take in sail, and make all snug. That's all about it, and I think he's about right."

"Well, sartinly," remarked Boston Bill, "it won't better us to go to the bottom, gold and all."



"And, you see," put in the ringleader, "when we've made all snug, we're just as we were before, with this in our favour, that we've been able to quench our thirst, which we couldn't ha' done otherwise till the arternoon at soonest. So what do you say, lads?"

"Hold hard," said the Baltimore Buck. "How's it going to be worked? How can we depend that they won't take advantage of us?"

"We must look out for that. Seems to me," said Dick, with a malicious grin, "that they are more likely to steal a march on them than they on us. You see we must be a good three to their one."

"Well, how is it to be worked?"

"First, we'll furl the foresail and close reef the topsail. It won't want all of you to go aloft to do that. The rest will keep a bright look-out, and haul on ropes on deck, and so on. On the first alarm every man that's aloft must come down like lightning. Bet my life we can be down on deck before they can get for'ard. Then we'll do the same on the main, furl the mainsail, and double reef the topsail. We shall be nearer aft then, certainly, but every man of us will be armed, and we can keep one eye on deck all the time. Besides, I don't believe that they'll attempt anything; no, not if they was certain to succeed."

"How's that?"

"I believe that second mate, though he's sharp and clever enough in some things, would be fool enough not to take advantage of the best possible chance because he'd given his word he wouldn't."

So deeply occupied were the mutineers in the discussion, and listening to the proposed plan of their leader, that nothing was heard of the uproar in the cabin caused by the frantic conduct of the captain. But just at this time Noah Plunkett rushed up on the poop, still shouting.

Now, of course, he was both heard and seen, and several heads were protruded from the deck-house.

"What on earth's the skipper up to?" asked the Baltimore Buck. "Why he's running up and down like a hunted hare. There goes his pistol. What the blazes is he a-shooting at?"

"What's he a-saying of?"

"Something about the Fin, that chap, Schrader, as he shot," replied one who had boldly gone out on deck.

"Bet your life, then," said Arnold, "he's haunted by the ghost of the Fin. I heard the chap say my own self, as if ever he was killed he'd haunt the man who did it; and them Fins are more than common men. I guess he's kept his word, and Noah Plunkett's got a pretty rough time of it."

Finding that those who had first ventured out on deck were not fired on, and that so far the truce agreed on was respected by the cabin party, the rest soon followed their example, urged by curiosity at the extraordinary behaviour of the captain, and presently the whole of the mutineers were gathered on the fore part of the deck, listening with something like awe to the wild cries and frightful blasphemies of Noah Plunkett.

When the skipper got to the mizen topsail yardarm, after a few moments' comparative quiet, his excitement grew more furious than ever. He writhed and wriggled about, got astride of the yard, then down on the foot-rope again, all the while shouting and screaming more vociferously than ever—

"Keep off! keep off, you cursed fiend! On deck there—will you keep this thing off me? By Heaven, I'll hang you all if you don't!"

Then a scream of terror as his ghostly enemy approached him coming along the yard slowly but steadily.

"Help! help!" he yelled. "For the love of Heaven, help! Keep him away from me! for God's sake keep him away from me!"

Now he seemed absolutely convulsed with agony and terror, and all hands gazed on his terrible contortions, listened to his terrible cries, oaths, and appeals for help, in intense awe. The mutineers forward, and the defenders of the ship aft, all alike, had their attention rivetted on the ghastly figure of the captain.

"I do believe the ghost of the Fin is going to drive him overboard," remarked Death's Head Dick.

"Aye," said another, solemnly, "I shouldn't wonder."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth than the captain gave a most terrible and piercing yell.

"Mercy! get away from me! For God's sake leave me! you're all over blood!"

The captain of the Thunder suddenly clambered up on the yard, and stood there with nothing to hold on by, swaying to and fro, flinging his arms about to balance himself, and crying out in the same manner.

Every one held their breath. There was a quarter of a minute of intense suspense; then, with one loud, piercing scream, Noah Plunkett leaped from the yard into the sea!

There was a rush to the front bulwarks as his body struck the water. But he seemed to sink at once like a stone, and not even his head was seen even for a moment.

At the same time a furious squall struck the ship, causing her to heel over almost on her beam ends. The gale was about to burst upon them in all its fury.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE CARRONADE.

A DEEP gloom, a horrid, silent terror, fell upon the scanty cabin party. Chief mate and captain had seemingly both perished within five minutes of each other. The first from his wound, the second by his own act; driven to suicide either in reality by the ghost of the murdered Fin, or by a phantasm of his disordered brain.

One by one they were dropping off. How much longer would they be able to maintain this terrible, almost hopeless struggle?

Simon the Sailor was the first to recover himself. Though greatly shocked and disheartened by what had happened within the last few minutes, he felt that a great responsibility rested on him, and a sense of that kept him up to the mark. Looking forward, he noticed that some of the mutineers, finding themselves unmolested on the fore part of the deck, had come farther aft, in order the better to observe the ter-

rible scene which had just closed with the death of Noah Plunkett.

Several were as far aft as the mainmast, and this he at once decided could not be allowed. So he at once hailed them.

"Forward there in the waist! Not a man to come farther aft than the fore part of the main hatch, or we open fire on you at once. Back you fellows by the main rigging! Back, or I'll see if a shower of lead won't hurry you up!"

His words had due effect, and the mutineers, who somehow did not feel quite so sure of ultimate victory as they did, retreated precipitately.

This settled, Royston hastened down into the cabin to arrange for getting the ship snug. There was no time to be lost, as darkness was beginning to close in, and the gale evidently commencing, the wind blowing in fitful gusts, each squall heavier than the one before.

A good deal has been written against "Dutch courage," but our young commander, now legally as well as actually captain of the *Thunder*, wisely thought that this was an occasion when his men required a powerful stimulant. So he caused the steward to offer to every one of the survivors unwounded, spirits and wine, and he himself set the example, and advised them to fortify themselves with a good dose, for they had some hard, and, perhaps, some dangerous work before them.

There were some cases of champagne in the store-room, and he ordered one of them to be opened, in order that those who did not care for spirits might partake of the sparkling juice of the grape.

While they were thus refreshing themselves, the young captain hastened to make his arrangements. He went to the break of the poop, and called for the captain of the mutineers by name. When Death's Head Dick appeared, he said—

"Now, then, Mr. Pirate, you set to work and furl the foresail and reef the fore topsail; also take in the jib. The fore topmast staysail is as much as she can stand. I'll see to the helm—that the sails are kept shivering, if you'll brace the fore yards in a bit to the wind!"

"Aye, aye! I'll see to it," was the reply.

"Let me know when you are ready. When you have finished with the sails on the fore, you can do the same with the main, only we will brace the yard for you as the ropes lead aft."

"Aye, aye! my chaps will be ready in a minute or two I'll let you know."

Each now returned to his own party. Royston found that the wine and spirits he had ordered to be so freely served out had done good service. The little band he had under his command to defend the vessel, the gold, and lives of them all, from the blood-thirsty wretches forward, were in much better spirits. Much abused alcohol had on this occasion done good service.

The young captain quickly explained to them his plans. The mutineers were to reef and furl forward, and make all snug. Afterwards they themselves were to reef the mizen topsail, furl the spanker, and tend the after braces, while the mutineers furled the mainsail and double reefed the topsail. They would all remain on the poop except two sentinels at the loopholes in the barricade below, until the sails forward had been duly reefed and furled.

Then he proposed that at the same time the pirates went aloft on the main to furl the mainsail and double reef the topsail, they would go aloft on the mizen, and close reef the mizen topsail.

His plan was acceded to as a matter of course, and he at once proceeded to put it in force.

Death's Head Dick had his men all ready in the fore part of the deck, and when Simon the Sailor explained to him his plan he at once acceded, and the topsail halyards being let go, the yard was heaved in a bit, and the reef tackles hauled out. Then the greater part of the mutineers went aloft to reef the sail, leaving, however, some half dozen of their number on deck.

The ease with which only a part of them handled the sail disquieted Royston. Now he thought to himself—

"That vagabond, Dick Smith, will perceive that there is no necessity to send so many men aloft to handle the sails on the main yards, and will have a greater number on deck,

perhaps himself among them. I have myself proposed that we should go aloft on the mizen at the same time, and he will insist upon it. If they attempt treachery we shall be in imminent danger. Those on deck may commence a desperate assault on the cabin, while all, or nearly all, of our men are aloft, and the rest of the villains can be down from the main topsail yard quite as quickly as we can from the mizen. I don't like the look of it at all."

He thought and thought, and at last hit upon a plan—a singular one—in the nature of a last desperate expedient ; He went down into the cabin, and caused the small carronade to be dragged aft, and its muzzle pointed down the hatch of the lazaretto or store-room.

This small hatch was just abaft the mizenmast, and the cannon was pointed at a place in the store-room, in the run of the vessel, just below the water line. The piece was loaded with a heavy charge of powder and a round shot.

Not a soul but himself knew the object of this manœuvre, and he did not think it necessary or advisable to explain.

"And now," he said to himself, as he went on deck, "it is necessary that Mr. Richard Smith should see my little arrangement. I wonder how he will like it."

When he got on to the poop, the mutineers had just furled the foresail, and were coming down on deck.

"Forward there !" he hailed.

"Hollo !"

"Where is Richard Smith, your ringleader?"

"Why here !" answered that worthy.

"I want to have a talk with you for a moment or two. Send all your men forward, and I will meet you as before, unarmed in the waist."

"All right."

Smith did as he was bidden, and in the course of a minute or so the two leaders of the cabin party and the pirates were standing face to face together on the quarter-deck.

"What is it?" asked Smith.

"Listen—and I'll tell you."

## CHAPTER XXV.

## HELEN VANDALEUR AMONG THE MUTINEERS.

"I WANT you to come aft down into the cabin with me," Royston said, quietly, after a short pause, "I've something to show you."

"I dessay you do," he replied, with a grin.

"Well, what do you say?"

"What do I say?—why, Walker—that's all."

"I promise you you shall return immediately to your fellow-pirates free and unharmed."

"You must think I'm a born fool, Mr. Second-Mate."

"I think you're a thorough villain," said Mr. Royston, boldly.

"Thank you, Mr. Second-Mate. I've heerd people make the same remark about me before, and I dessay they were about right."

"I want to show you something which will convince you of the hopelessness of what you have undertaken for getting possession of the gold."

"What is it you want to show me?"

"I can't tell you. You must see it with your own eyes."

Death's Head Dick was silent. A thought had struck him, and the more he considered it the more he liked the idea.

"It would be a fine thing if I could get a sight of the inside of this cabin—see how they have arranged it—how many there are of them—what wounded there are, and so on. I might get a wrinkle which would give us the day easy."

"Well, what do you say?" pursued Royston.

"It's not likely I'm going to trust myself among you without some guarantee for my safety. I shan't take your word any more than you would take mine. You know it's a life and death matter this, and when that's the case men don't stand particular about words and promises."

There was some truth in this, so Royston replied—

"What guarantee do you want?"

"Just this ; if I go aft one of your people must come forward ; so that if you slit my wizen, my pals may slit his'n ; which is poetry and sound sense."

"You want a hostage ?"

"You may call it so, if you please."

"Well, just wait a few minutes. I'll go aft and see about it."

"Right you are."

The young commander went down into the cabin, and briefly explained what was wanted.

"It is necessary to my plans that the chief of these mutineers—a scoundrel whom they call Death's Head Dick—should be taken down into the cabin and shown a certain arrangement I have made. My object is to convince him of the utter hopelessness of the desperate and criminal enterprise he and the other villains have undertaken. He will not trust himself in our hands unless his party has a hostage as security for his safe return. Now I myself would willingly be that hostage, but I must be with him in order to explain and impress upon him the impossibility of success. So one of you will, no doubt, accept the office."

Somewhat to the surprise and disappointment of Royston, his proposal did not seem to meet with much favour. No one seemed to like the idea of trusting his person in the clutches of these bloodthirsty pirates. More than one argued that possibly the villains might not care a bit for the fate of their leader, and in a fit of fury at once murder the hostage.

"This is awkward," thought Simon. "I suppose I must go as hostage myself, and entrust the explanation of my plan to some one else. Ezra Tanner, I fancy, is about the best of them all—cool-headed, and not to be scared."

There was certainly some ground for the reluctance shown to become hostage for Richard Smith, considering the character of the men, and the nature of the hold their leader had over them. It was quite possible he might have, if not open enemies, at any rate rivals, jealous of him, who might be glad to have him got out of the way.

All such a man or men would have had to do would be to refuse to give up or murder the hostage. Royston, however, did not think of this, and as he felt satisfied his plan



would be productive of good, resolved to carry it out at all hazards.

Death's Head Dick was a pretty shrewd ruffian, and would at once see the force of what was said to him. Our friend Simon had decided to go himself as hostage, and, after explaining matters, leave Ezra Tanner to deal with Death's Head Dick.

Suddenly, however, Miss Vandaleur, who had been sitting on a box in the cabin, near the mizenmast, and had heard all that had passed, rose and said—

"I will go as a hostage, since it is necessary some one should."

Whatever impelled her to take this resolve it would have been difficult for herself even to explain. It was an impulse, arising partly from pride, partly from pique, and from a desire to show Royston, with whom she had so bitterly quarrelled, that her spirit was by no means broken. Then, too, there was a slight tinge of a feeling—a relic of bygone days—that she would be saving him from danger. She did not own it, even to herself, but there, in a corner of her heart, it lurked.

No sooner had she spoken than she hurried on deck. Royston had no idea she would act so promptly, so did not hasten to follow her. What was his amazement, then, when he heard her hail—

"Forward there! Richard Smith come forth."

"Aye, aye," replied the mutineer, coming aft as far as the mainmast.

"I am willing to be hostage for your safety."

Rushing up, our hero saw her step on to the rail of the main rigging, at the break of the poop.

"Stay, Helen, stay! You don't know what you are doing," he cried.

She stepped boldly up to the mutineer chief.

"Now, sir, you go aft, I will go forward."

He seemed quite bewildered, but after a little hesitation obeyed. The next moment Miss Vandaleur was in the hands of the mutineers—

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## WHAT DEATH'S HEAD DICK SAW.

It was, indeed, a foolish, rash, mad act, on the part of this hot-headed young lady, pregnant with consequences disastrous enough, as she found to her cost.

Royston would have conducted the exchange with the utmost caution, for fear of treachery, whereas Miss Vandaleur boldly walked forward, without waiting to see whether the other hostage went aft.

Death's Head Dick, as it happened, was so surprised and bewildered at the hail, and sudden appearance of the young lady before him, that he failed to take advantage of the situation.

Her confident, fearless manner and speech, and the bold way in which she placed herself in the power of the vagabonds forward, astonished him so much, that he found himself obeying her orders before he knew what he was doing. For once he was caught napping.

Had he been on the alert, he might have darted forward after her, and thus have secured a valuable hostage, without giving one in return.

Royston, however, was fully cognisant of the danger, and so soon as he saw Helen walk deliberately forward, he sprang on to the barricade at the brake of the poop, and then leaping down on the quarter-deck, ran and placed himself between Smith and the other mutineers.

The mutineer leader had now lost his opportunity, for Royston instantly levelled his revolver at him; and seeing Ezra Tanner, who had hurried up at this alarm, cried—

“Cover this fellow with your pistol, Ezra, and shoot him instantly if he attempts to escape!”

Ezra instantly obeyed; and Death's Head Dick beheld the muzzle of two pistols pointed direct at his head. He turned deadly pale, and trembled all over.

“I am lost,” flashed through his mind. “They mean to hang or shoot me. They think that my death will so dis-

hearten the rest, that they will not dare injure the young lady, but will give up their purpose and surrender. I believe they are not far wrong. Some of them funk already. Fool that I was to get myself into this."

He glanced wildly around, seeking a means of escape.

"No tricks," cried Royston; "get up on the poop this very instant, or I'll put a bullet through your brain! I'm in no humour to be trifled with."

"But what's this for? Look here—"

"Up on the poop first, and talk afterwards," remarked our friend, in a determined voice. "Do as you are told this instant, or die."

There was a dangerous look in the eye of the young officer, which warned Smith that he would carry out his threat. So, with trembling knees, and face and forehead bedewed with a cold sweat, he got upon the poop slowly and clumsily.

"Grip him, Ezra," said Royston; "that's safer than a pistol, which may miss. I'll be with you directly."

Ezra Tanner instantly seized the mutineer by the collar, and held him in grasp of iron. Death's Head Dick now felt all but sure that his last hour had come, and that he was to die in some manner or other. Faint and sick he felt, and but for the firm grasp of the big horse-breaker on his collar, would have sunk to the deck. In a moment or two they were joined by Royston, who was almost as pale as the hostage, but from a very different cause.

"Now, then, you ruffian, speak to your fellow villains. Order them not to ill-treat the young lady in any way. See to it, for your own life depends on it. I swear by all that's sacred, that if they injure, outrage, or insult her in any way, I will blow your brains out instantly. After that I will make a desperate attack on the vagabonds, and if that is unsuccessful I will sink the ship, and all hands shall perish together! So see to it, I warn you."

"Yes, yes," gasped Smith. "I will do as you tell me. Don't choke me, please. Give me some water—brandy—anything. I am faint."

"A coward at heart, as all such wretches are," thought yston.

However, he was desperately anxious for Miss Vandaleur, and wished Dick Smith to speak for her at once. So he hastened to the cabin and brought up a decanter of brandy and a tumbler, and gave the hostage a good dose of the strong spirit. This, and the fact that no immediate harm seemed intended to him, somewhat reassured him.

"Now, then, speak to your accomplices; tell them what I have said," the young officer impatiently cried.

"All right, sir, all right. But what's this for? Why does this gentleman collar me, and you threaten to shoot me? You promised that I should not be harmed in any way, but allowed to go back."

"Yes, yes, but I did not know that young lady would be in the power of those ruffians forward."

"Why she came of her own free will as a hostage. Didn't you send her?"

"No, no; she was mad, absolutely mad, to have acted so. Make haste, and tell those villains what I say, will you? I repeat, that if she is injured in any way, your life will pay the forfeit."

Death's Head Dick now began to understand what all this excitement of the second mate was about, and at once his terror left him.

"Ah! ha! I see it all now. I am safe so long as they don't hurt the gal," he said to himself. "This chap is dead spooney on her, and didn't know she was going to offer herself as a hostage, or would have stopped her. Oh! what a fool I've been. What a chance I've missed! If I'd only been quick enough I might have been forward as soon as the gal, and got her safe prisoner without being in danger myself. He's sweet on her, and to have got her back safe would have given up the gold, at least—maybe the ship—on promise of all their lives."

Those vain regrets were interrupted by Royston.

"Come on, speak to your fellows, and that sharp."

Death's Head Dick did so, and the Baltimore Buck, who had taken command during his absence, answered, and said that his directions should be attended to, and that the girl was quite safe, and no one should be allowed to interfere with her in any way.

Royston breathed more freely.

"Now, then, come with me," he said, "and do exactly as I tell you. I will take hold of your jacket lest you should be inclined to play any tricks."

"All right, governor," replied the mutineer, confidently, for he knew now that he was safe.

Royston took him down into the cabin. He had previously caused a sail to be hung up right across at the mizen-mast as a screen, so that the hostage, to his great disappointment, could see nothing of the cabin except the after-part, where there was no one, and no object of the least interest except the cannon, which we have before mentioned as pointed down the lazaretto hatch. The young officer drew his attention to it.

"Do you see that carronade?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, look where it's pointed."

"I see; down in the lazaretto."

"Supposing it was fired, what part of the vessel would the charge strike?"

There was a lantern down in the store-room, which Royston had previously caused to be slung there, and, peering down, Smith could make out the inner skin of the vessel in the starboard-quarter, or "run," as it is called.

"It would hit her in the run," he replied.

"Above or below the water-line?"

"Below the water-line, I reckon."

"You are quite right. Well, this cannon is loaded with a large charge of powder, and a solid iron shot. A man will be constantly posted here night and day, and should it ever happen that you get the best of us in the next fight, the cannon would be fired, and a hole blown in her beneath the water-line big enough for a porpoise to swim in at. What would happen then?"

"Reckon she'd sink."

"Of course she would. The water would be over the gold in the hold in five minutes; up to the deck in ten; and she'd founder in less than a quarter of an hour. Now make no mistake; before you and your murdering thieves of companions shall get possession of either treasure or ship, that

cannon shall be fired, and we'll all go down together. I mean what I say."

Death's Head Dick was silent; he felt certain that the young officer would keep his word. This arrangement seemed fatal to their schemes. He had it in his power to blow a hole in the vessel at any moment, and sink her, long before the pirates could get at the gold.

Death's Head Dick looked as he felt, very much disheartened at this simple arrangement. It was not so much that it gave those in the cabin the power of sinking the ship, they could always do that by scuttling her—boring auger holes in her. But this device of the cannon gave them the power of flooding her hold almost instantaneously, and sinking her in ten minutes, long before a single ounce of gold could be got at.

It was possible the threat was only bounce and boast, but Dick Smith was pretty shrewd, and he had a strong idea that he would keep his word.

"We must fox 'em, circumvent 'em somehow. It's our only chance. Seems to me it wouldn't be a morsel of use if we were to storm the cabin, if this chap means to keep his word, and I believe he does."

"Well, that's all I had to show you. What do you think of it?"

The villain did his best to seem indifferent. He shrugged his shoulders, and replied—

"There is no doubt you can blow a hole in her if you're fool enough. If we had gained the day we should have to stop it, that's all."

"Do not talk like a fool. A thousand men, with all the appliances in the world, could not stop such a hole with the water rushing in like a cataract."

"Well, sir, we shall see. You go your way, we'll go ours."

His assumed indifference did not, however, for a moment deceive our friend, who had watched his countenance keenly from the first.

"All right, bold pirate. Your way leads to the gallows, mine is the path of duty and honour. I hope you will like it when you get to the end of your journey."

The young man spoke with the utmost confidence and cheerfulness. Indeed he felt in comparatively good spirits now he knew Helen Vandaleur was safe.

The confident tone of the other, which was obviously not a sham, tended still more to depress the ringleader of the mutiny. He fully made up his mind now that their only chance was by some stratagem or treachery.

Apart from the last desperate resort of blowing a hole in the ship's side, the second mate seemed not in the least alarmed for the result. The canvas screen across the cabin hid all the forward part from his anxious gaze, and led him to imagine that they were both stronger and had better means of defence than was really the case.

"Now, then, come on deck with me; you've seen enough, and can do as you like. I showed you this in order to convince you that your chance of getting the gold you covet was utterly hopeless. Do just as you like, attack when you like, you will always find me ready."

He spoke quite carelessly, and his words and manner caused Death's Head Dick to gnash his teeth in impotent rage.

"If I could only have managed to get the gal prisoner, and be free myself—if I could only get for'ard—it would be for me to make terms then! Who knows—I may get a chance."

The ruffian looked up and caught Royston's keen eyes fixed on his face. The young officer smiled slightly, as if he read the thoughts of the other. Dick Smith groaned inwardly.

"No chance, no chance; this chap is as keen as a hawk," he said to himself.

Just as they got on to the poop, the steward, following them up the companion-way, whispered to our hero—

"I wish you'd come down and see the third mate, sir; he's very bad, and I am afraid lock-jaw is coming on."

"Good heavens, I hope not. I will be with you in a moment."

He looked round the poop and saw Ezra Tanner and one of the men passengers. Calling them, he gave Smith into their charge.

"You've got a pistol, sir, haven't you?" he said to the other passenger; "I know Mr. Tanner has, and knows how to use it."

"Yes, I've got a pistol."

"Well, I give this man into your charge. If he makes the slightest attempt to escape, shoot him down without mercy."

"All right, never fear; he shan't get away."

Royston then went down into the cabin, full of concern for the third mate, whose wound he had not considered dangerous hitherto. The commander found him delirious and partially convulsed; he was just about opening the medicine chest, when he heard the report of firearms on the poop, followed instantly by a sort of scuffle, and the quick trampling of feet.

Royston ran on deck as quickly as possible, and a strange sight met his gaze. Ezra Tanner was leaning against the rail, holding on to the mizen-rigging; blood was running down his duck trousers in a copious stream. He was evidently wounded, and Royston's first thought was that the agreed upon truce had been broken by the mutineers, and that they had fired.

The next object his eye lighted on was the other passenger, whose coat was on fire, and which he was endeavouring to put out. He did not wait to speculate on the meaning of all this, but looked wildly for the prisoner—the hostage. But he was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's that vagabond man I gave in your charge?" he asked frantically of Ezra Tanner. The latter replied in a faint voice—

"Gone—bolted—that stupid fool, there, let his pistol go off, and shot me."

A cry of dismay broke from the young officer.

"Oh! Helen Vandaleur is alone, in the power of those ruffians."



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## A SECOND PARLEY.

THIS was a terrible and crushing blow to our gallant friend, who had hitherto sustained his spirits admirably. He felt in a moment or two stunned, and staggering to the mizen-rigging, leaned against the rail, holding on to the rigging, almost as faint as the wounded Ezra.

This had, indeed, been a disastrous evening. Mate and captain both lost. Next, the third mate much worse, and in danger of lock-jaw. Lastly, the ringleader of the scoundrel gang had escaped, while Helen Vandaleur remained in their power. What would be her fate? The young officer dared not think of it. The affair happened very foolishly, but very simply.

The other passenger—a weak, timid man, and not accustomed to the use of firearms—carried his pistol in the pocket of the coat he wore; he kept his hand on it, nervously twitching it about all the time, until presently he happened to press a little too heavily on the trigger, when off it went, the bullet passing through the fleshy part of Ezra Tanner's thigh, fortunately missing the bone. The pain and shock caused Ezra to stagger back, and the explosion of the pistol in the pocket of the coat setting that garment on fire, its owner was too frightened to do anything whatever except to try to put it out.

Death's Head Dick instantly seized the chance, and at the risk of broken bones, ran along the poop, and, leaping clean over the barricade, landed safely on the quarter-deck. A minute or two saw him safely under shelter in the deck-house.

It seemed like a fatality. For had the young officer been content with leaving the prisoner in charge of Ezra Tanner, that worthy would have held him firmly by the collar, and he might as well have attempted to break out of Newgate with a toothpick as escape from that powerful grip. Think-

—

ing, however, to make doubly sure, our hero had been the cause of bringing the catastrophe about.

Royston felt that he had perilled and gone through much for the sake of Miss Vandaleur, and now she had fallen into the hands of some of the most atrocious scoundrels unhung. In view of her terrible situation, he forgot the scornful and insulting manner with which she had treated him—forgot everything except that she was in villainous company, imminent danger, and that he had loved her.

What would they do with her? Alas! he guessed too well. The crafty ringleader would use her to compel them to his terms—to give up the gold and the ship. And when this was done Simon knew that they were all doomed to death just the same.

At one time he thought of a sudden and desperate assault and attempt at rescue, but very soon discovered it was impracticable. All hands were much disheartened, and now they were further weakened by the loss of Ezra Tanner, whose wound was still bleeding, and who of course would be of no use at present.

Simon the Sailor thought and thought, and the more he did so the more hopeless the case looked. What to do he knew not. Finally, despairing of anything else, and hoping that the mutineers might offer some terms, he resolved to have a parley with them.

And what of Helen Vandaleur? Up to the present time she was not ill treated in any way, nor, indeed, was she insulted until the escape of Death's Head Dick. She was placed in front of the foremast, a man on sentry over her. A thin rope was fastened round her waist, and also to the mast. It was not tight, but so knotted that her delicate fingers could not have undone it in an hour.

She was a good deal surprised when Death's Head Dick appeared from the deck-house, where he had taken momentary shelter after his escape, and confronted her.

"Well, young woman," he said, with a grin which made his cadaverous face look more hideous and skull-like than ever, "here I am, you see, and here you are."

"So I perceive," she replied, coldly. "Perhaps, now that you have returned in safety, you will unfasten this rope, and permit me to return to the cabin."

"Perhaps I won't. Not such a fool as that quite, I guess."

"But as they have released you, surely you will also release me?" she asked, a faint feeling of alarm rising in her breast.

"They didn't release me; I dodged 'em—escaped from 'em."

Miss Vandaleur now began to comprehend the terrible position in which she was placed.

"Ah!" she cried, and pressed her hand to her heart.

"You may say 'ah,' " he said, mockingly. "I've been too many for 'em, your sweetheart, the second mate, and all. I'll make him smart for this, for all his cannon."

"Speaking to my sweetheart! What do you mean?" she indignantly asked. "How dare you!"

"That's a good un! Why, I dare string you up to the yard-arm. I dare give you up to my pals to draw lots for you to see whose gal you should be. I dare take you for myself, if I like, when we've cut the throats of your sweetheart and all the rest of 'em aft."

The ruffian's words almost forced a cry of agony from her. She now knew the worst. She realised her situation in all its naked horror. He would, perhaps, have gone on taunting and insulting her, for he was by nature a man who delighted in inflicting pain on those unable to retaliate, but there came a hail from aft.

"Forward there, Richard Smith! Come aft, I want to speak with you!"

"Aye, aye, I'll be there directly. Another parley, eh? Thought you'd soon come begging to me, Mr. Bully Second Mate."

Miss Vandaleur recognised the voice of Simon the Sailor, and a thrill shot through her frame.

"Ah! he will save me; he's brave and skilful," she said to herself. Then she repented her thought. "Wretch that I am, I ought not to expect help from him, even to wish for it after what has happened."

Nevertheless, she did expect help from him, and wish for it, too, in her heart, or else she had been more than woman.

Death's Head Dick, after a few brief words to his subor-

dinates in command, went out on deck to hear what the new captain had to say.

"Well, guv'nor, what is it?" he asked, tauntingly. "I suppose you want me to come aft again, and give myself up as a hostage, eh?"

"No, I do not expect that; but I do ask in the name of humanity that you will allow the young lady to return. If you are a man you will not detain in terror and grief a woman who has never injured you."

"That's just what I will do."

"What will induce you to let the young lady come aft?"

"Give up your arms, the gold, and the ship."

"That is impossible."

"Then she can't come to you, fond as you are of her."

The captain took no notice of this, which made Helen's cheek burn.

"Will you be satisfied with another hostage?"

"I might or I might not. Depends on what it was."

"Will you accept in place of the lady whom you hold prisoner, another of more value to the people aft here, one whose loss they would feel severely?"

"I don't know."

"What do you intend to do with the lady?"

"Ain't made up my mind yet—perhaps hang her—perhaps draw lots who shall have her for his gal."

"Villain! you shall hang for this!" shouted Royston, furiously.

"She shall hang first, or t'other thing, just as I choose," was the insolent reply.

Royston was in despair.

"See here," he cried all at once, "I will do this. If you will let the young lady return to the cabin, I will give myself up to you in her place, and you can hang me if you choose."

This was certainly a desperate offer, and one which did not seem to offer much advantage in the long run to her whom it was intended to benefit, for deprived of him there would be no officer at all to direct the defence of the cabin. He, however, was driven to desperation, and argued that there was a chance that he might escape as Smith had done. Then if they murdered him there was also a chance that she

might be saved. For the cabin might still be defended, at all events, for a time, and a ship might heave in sight to help them, or many things might happen.

Helen Vandaleur heard this generous offer of her old lover with mingled feelings of shame and pride : her heart bounded within her, her face flushed a beautiful pink, her eyes flashed, and her bosom heaved.

" Ah ! noble heart, who but you would have ever made such an offer ?" she cried.

For a moment or two she forgot her danger, and was all in a glow of pride and admiration. Next she remembered her falsehood to him, how she had scorned and insulted him, and how he thus repaid her. Then she burst into tears.

" Wretch that I am, I do not deserve to live !" she cried.

" Come, will you take my offer ?" shouted Royston. " Yes or no ?"

" No ! I've got the gal, and I mean to keep her. We'll have you right enough by and bye !"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### IF A SHOT IS FIRED UP SHE GOES

NIGHT had now closed in on the gloomy scene. The wind, which had lulled a bit, began to increase, coming as before in sudden and violent gusts. The sea, too, grew every hour more lumpy, and the vessel began to pitch and labour a good deal. There was a moon, but so dense was the canopy of clouds, that her light was but of slight advantage.

Royston was not one to give up to despair ; and although he felt more cast down than ever he had before, resolved not to give up.

" Who knows what may turn up ?" he said to himself. " If the worst comes to the worst, we can make one final desperate assault on the villains, and rescue Helen ; and failing that—why I can sink the ship, and God have mercy on our souls !"

"What terms do you propose to let the lady go free, since you will not take one in her stead?" he asked, after a brief pause.

"We'll talk of that another time," answered the pirate; "seems to me if you intend to have the ship made snug, you'd better see about it. It's coming on to blow, and no mistake."

"Will you promise not to insult or injure the lady in any way, until we arrange some terms?"

"Oh, yes, I'll promise, if my word is worth anything."

There was no help for it at present, and it was absolutely necessary to get the vessel snug, and under small sail, to meet the storm, which was already almost on them.

Royston, with a heavy heart, but cool head, went to work, and made the necessary arrangements. He had lanterns along the break of the poop, so as to light up the quarter-deck, in order that they might be able to see if any treacherous attack was attempted by the mutineers.

"Now, then, Richard Smith, set to work! haul up the mainsail—get the topsail yard down—the reef tackles out, and your men aloft; when you've done that, I'll send the greater part of our men up to reef the mizen topsail. Don't forget, however, that there will be a good man at the cannon, and if there is a chance of successful treachery on your part, he will fire and blow a hole in her."

"All right: don't trouble yourself, let's get the ship under short canvas. Hanged if these squalls don't come heavier every time."

Death's Head Dick was now becoming alarmed at the increasing fury of the gale, and not without reason, for the vessel at times heeled over till her lee yard-arms dipped in the waves.

The work of furling and reefing was accomplished after a good deal of labour, but without accident. No attempt was made by the mutineers, and Death's Head Dick himself proposed a truce until the gale was over.

Though fully determined not to trust him, but to keep a vigilant look-out, Simon consented, and resolved to observe it strictly if the other party did. Indeed, such was the severity of the storm that the safety of the ship became a para-

mount consideration. At any moment an accident might occur which would require the united labour of all hands to prevent utter destruction.

The gale blew with unabated fury all that night, and till noon next day. Then the wind gradually fell, and the ship glided into calmer waters. She had weathered the storm, which, though furious, had been short, splendidly, and by the evening it blew only a stiff breeze.

Royston now again opened negotiations for the return of Helen Vandaleur. The answer of Death's Head Dick was short and decisive.

"Wait till after eight bells, and then we'll see what shall be done."

During the course of the afternoon wine and food had been sent forward from the cabin, and to make sure that she received some at least, some provisions, of which they stood sorely in need, were also sent to the mutineers. They were informed that on hearing from the lady's lips, or getting word in her handwriting, that she received what had been sent to her, and was not ill treated or outraged in any way, that more would be sent to them.

The steward volunteered the somewhat dangerous task of carrying the provisions forward. He said they would not injure or detain him, so long as there was a prospect of their obtaining further supplies from the cabin through him.

He proved to be right, and was suffered to go to and fro without molestation; he was even allowed to see and speak to Miss Vandaleur, and reported that she was confined under the top gallant fore-castle—a dismal den, with not room enough to stand upright. She had nothing to sit or lie on save some old canvas, but was sheltered from the rain and spray, and had not been ill treated beyond being continually taunted and insulted by Smith, the ringleader. She was allowed to have what was sent to her, always providing there was a much larger quantity forwarded to the deck-house.

At last evening closed in. Night came, eight bells (eight o'clock)—one bell (half-past eight), and Royston, who was impatiently waiting to hear what the villain Smith proposed, could scarcely restrain himself. Shortly before nine—when it was nearly quite dark—figures were dimly seen moving

about forward, and a man was seen to go aloft, and out to the fore yard-arm. Presently he heard Miss Vandaleur's voice, not crying or sobbing, but in tones as though she were praying aloud.

At nine o'clock exactly the voice of Death's Head Dick was heard.

"Strike two bells and light the lanterns. Aft on the poop there! If a shot is fired, or any attempt at rescue made, *up she goes.*"

The bell was struck twice, and three lanterns hanging in the fore rigging were lighted all together. Then Royston and his companions beheld a sight which made their blood run cold. He drew his revolver, and with gleaming eyes, and a furious exclamation, rushed forward.

"Remember!" shouted Death's Head Dick, "a single shot and up she goes."

Our hero restrained himself and stood pale, panting and boiling over with rage as he looked on the scene.

This was what he saw. On the fore part of the deck, port side, all, or nearly all, the mutineers were gathered. They were very merry, laughing and talking together, evidently enjoying the present fun and expected result.

A rope was drove through a block at the fore yard-arm. One part led through a snatch block just before the fore rigging. This Death's Head Dick had in his hand himself, and behind him it led into the deck-house, where others appeared to have hold of it, for it was pretty taut. And the other end of the rope?

It was around the neck of Helen Vandaleur! She was seated on an empty case in the middle of the deck, just abreast of the foretop mast and top gallant backstays. Her hands were clasped, and though no sound was heard, her lips could be seen moving in prayer. The wretches had forced her to take off, or had torn off, her dress, and she sat in her petticoats and other underclothing only.

This was the explanation of Death's Head Dick's threat, 'If a shot is fired, any attempt at a rescue made, up she goes!'

Some of the mutineers under shelter in the deck-house had hold of the rope, and if they hauled on it, of course



she was dragged up by the neck to the fore yard-arm, and would suffer a horrible and humiliating death.

Imagine the fierce rage and indignation which devoured Royston as he beheld this disgraceful sight. Helen Vandaleur, young and beautiful, whom he had once loved, seated thus ignominiously, her dress torn away, a rope around her fair white neck !

"Where are your thunderbolts, oh, Heaven?" he groaned aloud, in the agony of his spirit. "Why are such wretches allowed to live?"

After giving ample time for all aft to take in the scene, Death's Head Dick spoke:—

"Listen to my terms. I demand the surrender of the ship and the gold. If these are agreed with, the lives of all shall be spared, and they shall be put ashore as soon as possible. If not, every soul shall walk the plank when we do get possession of the ship. And to begin, this girl shall swing at the yard-arm. I give you a quarter of an hour to decide. If in that time there is no answer, or a refusal—up she goes, by Heaven!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

THERE was a solemn and death-like silence on the poop and in the cabin after this terrible threat of the ringleader.

"Give up the gold and the ship!" Royston thought of it for a moment, and then muttered—

"Useless, useless. We should all be murdered just the same. I know too much of the plans of that black-hearted fiend. It would be giving ourselves up to destruction without saving her. For, perhaps, in that case, she might be reserved for a fate worse than death. What is to be done? Heaven help and guide me!"

He seated himself on the skylight and buried his face in his hands. All looked to him for advice, instruction, orders, but alas! he had none to give. Suddenly he started up as if inspired with frenzy.

"The cannon! the cannon! yes, I will fire the cannon, and we will all perish together."

He thought a little bit, and then murmured sadly—

"No, no, I have no right; were it my life only, or to save her from death by hanging, or perchance further outrage, I would do it; but I cannot, dare not, except when *all* hope is gone, doom these poor ladies and the brave few, who still stand by me, to certain death."

He walked on to the lee side, away from all the rest, and stood gazing out on the sea. Suddenly, as though by inspiration direct from Heaven, a thought flashed, lightning-like, through his brain.

"I will try it. I will risk it," he said. "There is a chance. I may save her yet."

He then proceeded, as quietly and quickly as possible, to unfold his plan, and give directions to the others how best to render him assistance in the desperate attempt he was about to make.

"Fire, when you hear me shout the word, not before. Be especially careful not to hit the young lady. Take careful aim, but in no case at any one of the rascals who happen to be near her. If my attempt is partially successful, and they try to rescue her again, then fire, and rush out in a body and keep them at bay. The surprise, and the fact that you will have two volleys at them when they least expect it, ought to give you success."

All promised implicit obedience, and he prepared to put his plan into operation.

"It seems desperate risky, certainly," remarked Ezra Tanner, to whom he explained in full what he intended to do. "Suppose you fail in the first attempt—you see they've got the end of the rope in the deck-house—"

"I shudder to think of it—dare not think of it; but something must be done. I wonder if that vagabond will keep his word? If he does, and you fail to stop it as you intended, I'm afraid it will be a case of up she goes."

"Don't talk like that, for heaven's sake! I shall not fail now. Don't forget what I have told you, and, if the worst comes to the worst, make as good a fight of it as possible."

"Bet your life there!" ~~his~~ bones broke and blood shed if

they attempt to swing that poor girl. Good luck to you, Mister."

Koyston had stripped to his shirt and trousers, and, placing a revolver and a sharp sheath-knife in his belt, he got over into the mizen chains on the lee side, and disappeared from the view of the others.

The reader, however, may like to follow him in his dangerous enterprise—so dangerous that nothing but the desperate nature of the case could warrant the attempt.

Crawling along a spar, which was secured outside the vessel, he reached the main channels. After a short pause, he commenced ascending the main rigging as quickly and cautiously as possible.

He reached the top-gallant yard without being observed. Now commenced the dangerous part of his task. The main-top gallant stay led from the top-gallant mast-head to the foretop mast-head. It was necessary for the execution of his plan for him to pass along this, when of course he would be in full view of the mutineers on the fore part of the deck, should any one of them chance to look up. And of this there was imminent danger; for, as is well known, seafaring men are seldom a minute without glancing up, from the force of habit, even when there is no necessity for their doing so.

Should he be thus discovered, clinging to a single rope in mid-air, hanging suspended between the two masts, his fate would be a terrible one. It was almost certain he would be shot, and compelled to let go his hold on the stay before he could reach the foretop mast-head.

It was not without a shudder he thought of this contingency; and he pictured to himself the furious shouts of the enemy when they discovered him; the flash of the pistols and muskets; the whistle of the bullets, and then, last of all, the deadly faintness which always succeeds a gun-shot wound, and the terrible fall to the deck below, which must, of a certainty, utterly smash the frail body of flesh and bone, and destroy life.

Of all this he thought, but nevertheless started on his dangerous errand.

As rapidly as he could, he went hand over hand across.

the stay, and in less than a minute, to his infinite relief, found himself at the foretop mast-head.

The sail was close-reefed, so the yard was far below him. He took up a position on the outlines of the top-mast riggings, and after steadying himself a bit, he prepared for action. Below him, on the fore-part of the deck port-side, he could see a group of mutineers, and could distinguish perfectly all the arrangements made by Death's Head Dick.

He could plainly see the end of the rope around the neck of the unfortunate girl, and could follow it with his eyes up to the fore-yard-arm, then down again on deck, close to the fore-rigging, through a match-block hooked to a ring-bolt, and then into the deck-house, where, doubtless, many murderous hands were ready to grasp it, and run the helpless victim up to the yard-arm.

Helen sat with her hands clasped and head bent down, and appeared overwhelmed at the horror of her situation. As he gazed, boiling with indignation and hatred for the cold-blooded, cruel scoundrel who could thus torture a helpless girl, Death's Head Dick himself came out of the deck-house.

"On the poop there!" he hailed.

There was no response for a moment or two; as, in the absence of our hero, no one volunteered at once as spokesman.

The chief of the gang grew impatient, and hailed again.

"Aft there, on the poop! Do you hear? Time's up!"

"Holloa!" replied a voice, and at the same moment Ezra Tanner came forward.

"Time's up, I tell you! Now then, let's have an answer! Quick and sharp—yes or no! If it's no, up she goes!"

There was no reply to this, and Royston guessed that they were holding a conference as to what should be done. He thought it likely that some of the more timid of the passengers, and probably all the women, would be in favour of submitting and trusting to the promise of the mutineer chief that their lives should be spared.

Death's Head Dick grew impatient.

"Now, then! aft there! Do you hear? Give up? Come out unarmed, or by Heaven, up goes the gal! You think I

won't do it—maybe that I daren't do it. If you fancy that, you're terribly mistaken, that's all I've got to say. Just you look here. We've done enough already to make it a hanging matter for us. There's been bloodshed and dead men o' both sides; that being so, one more can't make any difference. They can't hang us twice. So, by Heaven, if you don't come in, in one minute, up she goes to the yard-arm!"

With these words he laid his hand on the rope which stretched across the deck, one end of which was fast around the neck of Helen Vandaleur. With a rude snatch he suddenly tightened it. She screamed from pain and terror. Simon the Sailor gnashed his teeth, and swore vengeance inwardly.

Royston did not content himself with this, however, but at once went to work. Drawing his sharp clasp-knife, he hastily cut adrift a good-sized block which was lashed under the top-gallant crosstrees. He was nearly right above the mutineer chief, who stood near the centre of the deck, about six or seven feet from his fair captive, the rope still in his hands.

Royston proceeded to take deliberate aim at the ruffian's head with the heavy block.

"Now, then, time's up!" cried the mutineer, angrily, with another savage snatch at the rope. "Where's that——second mate? Why don't he come out and speak? Where is he?"

"He is here!" shouted Royston, in a transport of rage—"here, you murdering scoundrel!"

At the same moment he let fall the block, and, without waiting to see the effect, seized hold of the fore topmast-backstay, slid rapidly down, leaped on the deck, and stood in the midst of them.

At the very moment in which he executed this manœuvre, the fierce, cruel order was given—

"Swing her up, lads! To the fore-yard with her! A long pull and a strong pull—up she goes!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

NOW OR NEVER.

HELFN VANDALEUR having never in her life been in danger of personal injury, either from the cupidity or other evil passions of mankind, was not disposed to look in the most serious light on the escape of the hostage and her own detention. She looked upon it as an untoward accident, and thought that it might entail inconvenience on her friends afterwards—perhaps worse to herself, if not positive hardship. Beyond this her foreboding did not go.

What she felt most were the bitter taunts and insulting language of Death's Head Dick.

As we have said, she was allowed food and even wine, and had a sort of shelter to shield her from the weather, and bed to lie on underneath the top-gallant forecastle.

All through the dreary night she slept not, but hoping and thinking that she would be rescued. And despite of herself, in all these weird pictures of rescue, our hero, Simon the Sailor, was the prominent figure. Since she had heard him nobly offer himself in her place, her feelings had undergone a great change; her heart yearned towards him, and the flame of the old love, which she thought she had crushed out, burned up with fresh ardour.

The day passed drearily enough, no event of the slightest importance occurring. A sort of sullen truce seemed to exist between the opposing parties, and though a vigilant look-out was kept on both sides, the vessel was allowed to speed merrily on under stout sail with a brisk breeze.

They had command of the helm aft, and Royston, taking advantage of this, caused her to be steered direct for the western coast of South America. If it were possible, he meant to take her into Valparaiso, or should the winds be contrary for that port, into any other he could, where there was a likelihood of finding a man-of-war, either English, French, or American.

But that he would be permitted to do this without another and probably more desperate struggle, he was not sanguine enough to believe. It was probable that the course they were then steering, suited the plans of the ringleader just as well as his own, and hence the vessel was allowed to sail gently along in a north easterly direction.

As the second night of her captivity approached, the unfortunate young lady began to grow uneasy. The help she expected had not come. Royston, who she persuaded herself would certainly rescue her, or contrive some means for her return, made no sign. She did not fully appreciate the difficulties in the way. She did not consider that with a small band of men, most of them dispirited, some of them nervous and timid as women—in fact, utterly useless—it would be madness to attempt an assault on the stronghold of some score of determined and stalwart ruffians.

Her heart began to fail her when she found that no aid came from aft, and after a time she began to ponder over certain words and threats let drop by Death's Head Dick, and to wonder what they intended to do with her. Surely they would not keep her a prisoner in that close, narrow den!

Shortly after dark on this second evening, the chief of the gang put his head into the top-gallant fore-castle, over the windlass, and ordered her to come forth. He held a lantern in his hand, and by its light she could clearly distinguish his cadaverous face. The resemblance of the head to a skull was now complete. The hollow eyes, high cheek-bones, grinning teeth, and the ghastly hue, and still more repulsive expression of his features, all combined, caused a shudder to shoot through her frame. Involuntarily she shrank away from him.

"You needn't scrudge up in the bows, as if you meant to get through the hawse hole," he said, in a hard, cruel voice. "You've got to come out of that. I want yer."

"I will come out. I am not afraid. I am innocent of any harm in word, deed, or intent."

"Dessay you are; but others ain't," he sneered; "and it seems to me likely you'll have to pay for what they've done, and what they won't do."

She came out on deck as ordered.

"Here, catch hold of her, some of you chaps, and get her ready for execution.

"For execution!"

Helen's heart stood still. Surely they did not mean to murder her! Their acts seemed to indicate that such was their intention.

"Off with that muslin gown," cried Smith, brutally, "it's only in the way, and will be hooking on to something or other when we start to swing her aloft."

Helen neither screamed nor fainted. All her faculties were numbed by horror and fear, and even when these wretches proceeded to tear her muslin dress from her back, she stood with clasped hands, pale and—but for their rude handling—motionless as a statue. Then, when she stood in her petticoat only, Death's Head Dick himself approached her, and, with a hideous mockery of politeness, said—

"Allow me, madam, to put the necklace round your throat."

With the words he slipped the noose of a half-inch rope over her head, and drew it rather tightly round her delicate neck.

"Some grease, Bob—a little slush from the cask. It would be a pity if the rope was to 'jam' instead of running smooth and nice."

She felt the dreadful rope round her neck—felt the ruffian daub it with filthy grease—heard him give directions to run her up to the yard-arm the instant he gave the word—and yet she neither screamed nor fainted. An empty cask was placed for her in the middle of the deck, and on this she seated herself and prayed.

To say that she was not in mental terror would be untrue. Who in such circumstances, with a violent and painful death staring them in the face, could be otherwise?

And then all at once the lanterns were lit, and she heard Death's Head Dick hail the poop, and make his demand for the surrender of the vessel and the gold.

The penalty for refusal was to be Helen Vandaleur's instant execution!

She heard and understood all, and yet did not believe



that the ship would be surrendered absolutely, and that all **aft** would entrust themselves to the mercy of the blood-thirsty gang led by Death's Head Dick. She did not believe or expect this, but she cherished a hope—a vain, mad hope it seemed, of rescue at the last moment—rescue by the agency of Royston, her despised lover.

And then came the last supreme moments of agony. For a time she remained with her face buried in her hands—trembling, faint, and with hope all but dead within her. She heard the last stern demand—felt the cruel snatch at the rope, which caused the noose to tighten painfully around her neck.

She looked up and gazed wildly around, looking for help in this hour of extremity. She heard Death's Head Dick ask for the second mate—felt another snatch on the rope, which drew it yet tighter round her neck, causing her to give a gasping cry.

Then she heard a voice as though from the sky. His voice! The crash of the heavy block as it fell on the deck, hurled down from aloft by Royston, was followed by a shout, or rather yell, from Smith to run her up. And in one more moment there came a body from aloft with a rush.

A momentary pause on the bulwarks—a leap on deck—and Royston, crying "Now or never," stood before her with a keen sheath-knife in his hand.

She heard the stern command once more repeated—"Up she goes!—run her up, boys!"—and then she fainted.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### ROYSTON SAVES HELEN.

WHEN our friend Simon landed on the deck, after his rapid descent from the foretop masthead, he found himself much in the position of Daniel in the lion's den, with this against him, that the lions were not restrained by a superior power.

He had slid down the stay at such a pace as to burn the

skin off the palm of his hands by the friction, and, moreover, landed on the deck with a considerable shock. He stood for a moment or two half dazed by the glare of the lanterns, and the suddenness of the affair ; he had his sheath knife in his teeth as he came down the back stay, and now took it in his left hand.

Royston's sudden and unexpected appearance among them, as though from the clouds, disconcerted the mutineers for a time. They scattered like sheep, some taking refuge in the deck-house, others running forward. Death's Head Dick retreated a couple of yards, and then stood his ground : he was cool enough to observe that it was only one man who had thus come down among them.

The block which Royston had aimed at his head struck his left arm, which held the rope, causing him to drop it in a moment or two. Pain and rage seemed quickly to overcome him, and he thought only of revenge. Snatching the rope again with his right hand, he turned to the deck-house, and shouted the order again.

"Haul away, lads! Up with her! Run her up to the foreyard!"

Royston made a bound towards him, but Dick Smith prudently retreated before the gleaming knife the young officer had in his hand, and drew his pistol. The rope which was to hoist the now insensible girl to the yard-arm tautened, as the men within the deck-house hauled on it, in obedience to the orders of the leader.

"Up she goes! One pull more, and she's on her legs and swinging over the sea!" shouted Death's Head Dick savagely.

This caused our friend Simon to turn suddenly round towards Miss Vandaleur. The movement saved him from a bullet, which whizzed close past his head.

The unhappy girl, now quite insensible, was at that moment being dragged up from the empty case (along which she had fallen when she fainted) by the rope. In another moment she would have been swung clear of the deck, and hoisted aloft by the neck!

Royston made a leap ; and then, seizing the rope in the left hand, with one cut with the right he severed it a foot

above her head. She had been dragged up almost to a standing position, so he was able at once to clasp her in his arms, which he instantly did, and, straining every nerve, made a dash aft.

A yell of rage broke from Death's Head Dick, quickly followed by the sharp reports of his revolver-pistol, as he fired shot after shot. Not one took effect, however, possibly by reason of his being too excited to take steady aim.

Those in the cabin, hitherto, had been afraid to fire ; for, by ill fortune, Royston and Miss Vandaleur were right in the line, and it would have been highly dangerous to do so. When, however, the second mate, carrying the insensible girl, turned towards the starboard side on his way aft, the deck was clear to windward ; and just as the mutineers, answering to the shouts of Dick Smith to follow him, rushed from the deck-house, a rattling volley somewhat checked their ardour.

Death's Head Dick, however, was not to be thus repulsed ; he decided that now was the time for a desperate assault, and though the volley wounded three men—one badly—he rushed aft, followed by the rest of his men, in pursuit of the second mate.

The burden the latter carried hampered him a good deal, and when he got to the break of the poop, there was no one to receive her from him and drag her up. The fore part of the cabin, opening on to the quarter-deck, was strongly barricaded, and it was impossible to remove the obstructions, so as to allow a passage of even Helen's slight form to pass.

The delay at the poop was most disastrous. The mutineer chief, followed by his two lieutenants, and some of his best men, made their way aft, firing as they came.

At last the steward and Ezra Tanner appeared on the poop, and seizing hold of the miserable girl as best they could, dragged her up. Meanwhile, one of the men who had followed Death's Head Dick, had been shot through the head, and the Baltimore Buck was wounded. The others began to beat a retreat, for those in the cabin were knocking fresh loopholes, so that they could cover them better.

Dick Smith, with a yell of rage, rushed at Royston, just as

the latter was clambering on the poop, and dragged him back.

"Quick here, one of you chaps! Let's drag this fellow forward, and the game's ours!"

One of the staunchest of the ruffians answered this appeal, and in another moment our hero felt himself being dragged forward, despite his most desperate struggles.

The other man, a powerful sailor, in the very prime of life, held him by the throat in an iron grasp, while Dick Smith, seizing him by the collar, tugged away so furiously, as to tear away his hold from everything he could lay hands on.

The gallant officer made one final desperate struggle at the rail about the mainmast, locking his arms around it. But his hold was torn loose, with violence enough to dislocate his shoulder. And then he felt himself being dragged forward.

Royston had saved Helen, but was now a prisoner himself, and would probably have to meet the fate intended for her—death by hanging!

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### ROYSTON IN THE HANDS OF THE MUTINEERS.

THE swoon of Miss Vandaleur was not of long duration. When she fainted, she had a dim, indistinct idea of a champion descending from the clouds to rescue her, in the shape of Simon the Sailor. It was but as a vision, and the next moment was dark, and the outer world, with all its terrors, vanished from her sight.

She awoke from her faint almost suddenly. They had laid her on the deck, just in front of the forecabin, when she was dragged on the poop. She came too with a gasp and wild look of terror, just as the mutineers were dragging the second mate forward.

It seemed, however, that this was not to be accomplished without opposition. Ezra Tanner was vehemently exhorting the cabin party to make a rush and rescue their commander.

"We must save him, lady—we must save him! In him is our only hope. See how he has fought for us with hand and brain. It would be a cowardly thing to let him be dragged off and murdered. Come, we have beaten them off and shot several, let us make a rush on them, and the day's our own."

Before speaking he had lit the blue lights, which were placed all along the break of the poop, and, by their livid glare, all that was being done fore and aft the ship could be plainly seen.

Flushed by their recent partial victory, and stirred up by the words of Ezra Tanner, the party on the poop seemed about to attack the enemy. The rattle of cutlasses and the snap of revolvers, as the firearms were examined, was heard; still, they did not evince that alacrity and ardour so necessary to success in an attack.

Miss Vandaleur, standing up, gazed around, at first in terror and bewilderment on the scene. Then, at first slowly, but, when once it began to dawn, the truth broke on her like lightning's flash. She knew not that Royston had rescued her at the peril of his life, and was now himself a prisoner, being dragged forward, probably to suffer the cruel fate from which he had saved her.

In an instant her whole frame was animated with life and fire. She felt like a heroine of old, and, like Joan of Arc the fierce resolve possessed her to lead the attack and gain the victory.

Heedless of her scanty attire, she rushed forward into the glare, and seizing one of the blazing blue lights, waved it above her head. The sparks flew in all directions, showering down upon and around her.

With hair dishevelled, face flushed, eyes gleaming with excitement, she looked, as she stood thus in her white garments, like some fierce but lovely fury.

"Follow me if ye are men!" she cried. "I, a woman, will lead the way. Let us rescue him, and drive these ruffians before us overboard!"

With the same promptitude as when she had so rashly offered herself as a hostage, she clambered on to the barricade, stood there for a few moments waving the blue light,

and then, alone and unprotected, sprang down on to the quarter-deck. She was not left alone long.

"Come on, lads! We should be cowards indeed to suffer a woman to show us the way, and not follow. Death to the pirates! Hurrah!"

Ezra Tanner leaped to the deck, instantly followed by the rest. A few shots were fired, then a determined rush was made forward, and a desperate hand-to-hand conflict commenced.

The deck of the Thunder now presented a scene worthy of Pandemonium. The lanterns hung in the fore rigging by Dick Smith's order, for the proposed execution of the unhappy girl, still burned, their yellow light mingling with the vivid, ghostly glare of the blue lights.

After the first half minute very few shots were fired. It was a hand-to-hand conflict, and so closely and desperately were the combatants engaged, that there was scarcely any chance for using firearms. Occasionally, amidst the conflict, the sharp crack of a revolver might be heard; but it was singular how little harm was done by the many bullets fired from the commencement to the end.

"On to them, lads! Break their backs! Overboard with the murdering wolves! Give 'em no quarter!" shouted Ezra Tanner.

"Keep together, men, keep together! Don't go for'ard of the deck-house door!" yelled Dick Smith. "Get that chap inside—in with him, alive or dead—knife him, too, if he kicks—in with him, and we win!"

Two men had now hold of Simon the Sailor, who, despite what the chief of the gang had said, struggled and fought most desperately.

Dick Smith had no knife, and all the barrels of his pistol had been discharged. This, too, was fortunate for the second mate, for the ruffian placed the muzzle close to his head, and pulled the trigger.

"Confound your soul!" he yelled, as the hammer only snapped on the nipple. "Take that!"

With the words he dealt the unfortunate young officer a terrible blow—a blow delivered with his whole force on the bare head. Royston's struggles instantly ceased.

With a deep groan he sank to the deck deluged in blood from a wound above the right temple. His groan was answered by a woman's shriek.

"Save him! save him! They are murdering him," cried Helen Vandaleur, in a voice loud above the din of the fray.

"In with him! drag him into the deck-house dead or alive!" again yelled Dick Smith.

The young man lay like a log, helpless—utterly at the mercy of the foe. Then they hauled him up from the deck, and, getting his head and shoulders over the sill of the door, commenced to drag him in.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### EZRA TANNER RESCUES ROYSTON.

"I'LL be hanged if you do, though!" shouted Ezra Tanner, as, with a shout, he dashed through the enemy, and charged at the men who had hold of the now insensible second mate. Tanner carried an awful and most dangerous weapon, which he wielded with a marvellous effect. Happening to stumble and fall close to the bulwarks, opposite the main hatch, his left hand grasped something which at first he thought was a handspike.

It proved to be the staff of a harpoon, and drawing it out, he found that the iron was attached to it, and also a coil of thin rope, called "rattlin stuff." It had probably been got in readiness for harpooning porpoises before the mutiny broke out, and had since been lying, unnoticed and unthought of, close under the bulwarks.

But here it was, a most excellent weapon to his hand. With a touch of ghastly humour, Ezra threw the coil of rope to the cook, who was close to him.

"Stand by here to haul in!" he cried; "I'm going to harpoon some of these chaps, see if I don't!"

Tanner had no sooner spoken than he made a furious rush forward, using the harpoon in the first instance as a staff, and clearing a path before him by knocking down all

in his way : his height and great strength gave him a wonderful advantage with such a weapon. The first two or three in his road went down like ninepins, and levelling the harpoon lance-like, he charged the two men who were dragging the second mate into the deck-house. They had got the young officer's body half inside, and another second would have been too late.

Ezra, charging furiously forward, took good aim with the harpoon. The barbed iron passed through the fleshy part of the arm of the first man, and still driven onwards with irresistible force by the whole weight and strength of our friend, the other man was completely transfixed, the harpoon going in at the chest and coming out between the shoulders.

Then were heard dreadful yells of agony, followed by a triumphant shout from Ezra Tanner as he dropped the harpoon, and grasping the insensible second mate by the collar, dragged him out on to the deck.

"Haul away on the harpoon, lads!" shouted Ezra, "haul away with a will! I've struck two fish—two fine fish. Haul 'em in."

Then commenced a dreadful scene, which struck terror into the hearts of the mutineers. Ezra caught up the inanimate body of the second mate, the blood streaming from his wounded head, and easily bore him off.

The cook, a sailor, and the rest of the passengers, had hold of the harpoon rope, and instantly did as Ezra had said. Regardless of the moans and yells of agony of the two men transfixed by the harpoon, they proceeded to drag them aft by main force.

Never, surely, was a more horrible sight witnessed. Both locked together by the harpoon, bleeding, writhing with pain, tumbling over and over, one in the agonies of death, the two unhappy wretches were dragged along the deck, smearing it with blood as they went. Their moans and yells were simply awful, so much so that Miss Vandaleur not only shut out the horrid sight from her eyes, by turning her face away, but felt forced to stop her ears also.

The ghostly, livid glare of the blue lights, and the yellow glimmer of the lanterns, shone on this scene of blood and horror,



The mutineers, scattered in terror, gazed, panic-stricken, at the strange and terrible tragedy being enacted, and made a rush forward to gain the shelter of the deck-house, leaving one dead on the deck, one wounded, and the two harpooned men, the second of whom was also in the last agonies. Just as these two had been dragged abaft the mainmast, the harpoon tore right out of the flesh of the man who had been run through the arm, and he was free so far. It availed him little, however, for as he staggered to his feet, and, faint and sick from loss of blood and pain, sought to seek safety forward, his skull was smashed in by a terrible blow from a handspike.

The desperate encounter was now for the present over. The defenders of the cabin, who had thus boldly attacked the mutineers, had three wounded, one, the steward, badly. The mutineers had three wounded and three dead—one shot through the body, and both of the two who had been harpooned by Ezra Tanner.

The latter, after this successful feat of arms, had safely carried Simon the Sailor aft—and while yet the two wretches he had transfixed were howling and writhing in agony—and taken the wounded officer down into the cabin, where he left him to the care of Helen Vandaleur and the women, and hastened back, full of fight, eager for another round with the foe. But by the time he again reached the quarter-deck, all was over for the present.

The harpooning, dragging off, and horrible death of their best men had quite demoralised and disheartened the mutineers, and they all hastened to seek shelter and barricade themselves in the deck-house.

A sharp fire from the loopholes of the latter, warned the victors to seek shelter also, and they retreated, taking their wounded with them, while they left three dead of the enemy on the field of battle.

The blue lights burned out, the lanterns waxed dim, and, save for the wash of the waves, and the groans of the wounded, all was silent as the grave. Any one suddenly transported on board the Thunder at that moment could never have imagined that but a few minutes back such a terrible conflict had been raging.

The deck was smeared and slippery with blood, but the imperfect light might have hidden that fact. And as for the three forms stretched on the planks, they might have been asleep instead of dead, as was the case.

One of the male passengers was by trade a chemist and druggist, and, being an intelligent man, knew a good deal of wounds and surgery in general. He knelt on one side of Royston, as he lay stretched—pale, blood-smeared, and ghastly—on a mattress in the cabin. Helen Vandaleur knelt on the other side, her eyes and face full of wild terror.

"Is he better, sir? Is he coming round?" she asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Madam," said the passenger, slowly rising from beside the inanimate form, "he will never come round—*he is dead.*"

With a gasping cry, Helen—the proud, the haughty—threw herself on the body of the man whom she had scorned, but who had loved her so well.

"Dead! dead! dead!" And her heart died, too.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### ROYSTON RECOVERS FROM HIS WOUNDS.

As a wolf, wounded and driven to his lair by the dogs, snarls, growls, and licks his wounds, so did Death's Head Dick set about repairing damages, cursing, blaspheming, and muttering threats all the while against those who had again got the better of him in open fight.

The affair was so utterly unexpected at its commencement, while the episode of the harpoon, which really decided the day, was so terrible, that the mutineer by no means accepted the result as a genuine defeat. Nor in this was he altogether wrong; for it is pretty well certain that but for the surprise and other favourable circumstances, the mutineers, with their superior numbers, would easily have beaten off their assailants, and would then doubtless have become the attacking party, and perhaps have taken the cabin by a rush,

But though he himself felt more anger than dismay at the result, he found it next to impossible to revive the drooping spirit of his gang. They had been beaten, badly beaten, with the loss of six men killed and wounded, and, in spite of all their efforts, both the girl and the second mate had been forcibly rescued.

The dead bodies lying out on the deck offered ghastly evidence of the past, and do what he would, Dick Smith could by no means persuade them that it was purely an accident by which they had been discomfited, and that, but for Ezra Tanner and the harpoon, they would have won.

"Anyhow, lads," he urged, "they've suffered as much as we have, and they can't afford it. We know now that they haven't got more than eight men fit for work. And then, too, the second mate—he's settled. I felt his skull crash in when I hit him with the butt of my pistol.

This was some consolation, for all knew that the second mate was the leading spirit aft. Nevertheless, Death's Head Dick saw that it was hopeless to urge his men to another attack, at least at present; so he resolved to make the best use of the time, see to the wounded, go on with the tunnel through the cargo, and watch for an opportunity.

He was now a little uneasy, as hitherto scarce anything had been gained. They were now no nearer the treasure than when the mutiny first broke out, and had suffered heavily in dead and wounded.

He was well aware that something must be done within a short time; indeed, that it was essential they should gain possession of the ship within the next ten days, for the course they were now steering was taking them not only to a cross track of ships going to and returning from California, but, moreover, they were approaching the coast of South America. Another week's sail, with a fair wind, would bring them within seven or eight hundred miles.

The night passed without further incident. A silence as of the grave reigned throughout the ship, the two contending parties remaining within their respective strongholds.

Shortly after daybreak, Death's Head Dick, his left arm in a sling, came out on the deck, and hailed—

"Cabin, ahoy!"

After some delay, Ezra Tanner appeared on the poop, and answered.

"Ah, ha!" thought the mutineer, triumphantly, "I was right, then; the second mate is dead. That makes the affair simpler. We're bound to win."

He then went on to propose a truce for an hour, in order to wash down the deck, which was splashed and smeared with the strife, and to remove the bodies, and to commit them to the sea.

This was agreed upon, and the mutineers proceeded to carry away their dead, and wash down the deck. This done, the yards were trimmed, more sail made, and other necessary operations performed. Any one who saw the ship from a little distance would never have guessed what a terrible strife had raged on board a few hours previously, and what future horrors were in store.

Perfect quiet reigned. No longer was heard the crack of revolvers—the louder reports of rifles. It seemed as though, by mutual consent, the opposing parties were resting and preparing for another struggle.

Forward, advantage had been taken of the opportunity to get several buckets of water out of the cask on deck. These were carefully stored in the deck-house, and as the tank in the hold had been nearly reached by the tunnelling party, it did not seem likely they would suffer in that way again.

About noon, two of the wounded down the fore-scuttle died, and were thrown overboard.

So favourably had the work of tunnelling aft progressed, that a new idea struck Smith. This was to penetrate right aft in the same way, and suddenly rush up into the cabin through the lazaretto, or store-room hatch, and thus take them by surprise.

This would, of course, be dangerous, for, if the defenders discovered their designs, and laid in ambush, they might inflict great slaughter before the mutineers could effect a footing in the cabin. Nevertheless, the plan was feasible, and it was certain that something must be done, and that promptly. He went down below, and took accurate measurement of the length of the tunnel, so as to judge under what exact spot the end was.

The day passed quietly enough. There was a brisk, fair wind and a smooth sea, and the vessel glided merrily towards the north-east. It was just sundown, and the ringleader of the mutineers, looking somewhat uneasily at the sky, which again bore a threatening appearance, when the man on the look-out in the crow's nest put his head out, and said, in a low voice—

“Sail, ho!”

“The deuce!” cried Smith, with a start.

“Dead to windward?”

He went up and had a look. The vessel was yet many miles off, and only her top-gallant sails could be seen. Nevertheless, it seemed to Dick's keen eye that she was standing down towards them. He turned pale as he realised all the consequences should such prove to be the fact.

So soon as she was near enough, they would hoist signals of distress aft, and then, doubtless, a boat would be sent on board with assistance.

“Have they seen her aft, yet?” he asked.

“No, I think not; there ain't a soul on deck but the man at the wheel, and he hasn't made any sign.”

“We must manage to keep her off. Get a lot of head sail on her, so that they can't keep her to windward with the rudder.”

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, than the man at the wheel also perceived the vessel to windward, and sung out—

“Sail, ho!”

It was done without thought, as a matter of habit, and well nigh proved fatal to him; for at the same time he came over to windward to get a good look at the sail, and so exposed himself.

“Confound you, you yelping fool!” muttered Death's Head Dick, savagely. “If you could have kept your eyes away and tongue quiet, we might have paid her off a couple of points, and dropped the strange sail before dark. Let's see if this will quiet you.”

With these words he took a rifle from the hand of the look-out in the crow's nest, and aiming deliberately at the helmsman, fired. The bullet cut a piece out of the neck

of the man's shirt—a smart reminder of the danger of exposing his person. The next moment a strange and terrible-looking apparition came up from the cabin, and showed the head and shoulders above the companion-way.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### HELEN VANDALEUR'S REMORSE.

THE figure of a man it was, with head bound up in white bandages streaked with blood. The white shirt he wore was also crimsoned with the vital fluid. The face was ghastly pale, and the two bandages coming over the forehead and temples so altered the expression of the features that, at first, Death's Head Dick did not recognise our friend Royston, the second mate.

"Curse him! I thought he was dead," growled the arch mutineer. "He's got as many lives as a cat—but I'll have a shot at him."

But warned by the whistle of the bullet aimed at the helmsman, Royston withdrew under shelter.

The terrible blow the second mate had received on the head had not killed him outright, as the passenger who had examined his head thought. Nor was the skull fractured, though the blow had inflicted a bad bruise and cut, the shock causing insensibility, while a branch of the temporal artery having been divided, caused the patient to faint away from loss of blood, when he was recovering from the stunning effect of the blow. The blood had ceased flowing when he fainted, and it was this which gave rise to the idea that death had ended his career.

Helen Vandaleur, watching in silent agony by the side of what she considered his dead body, was the first to discover signs of life.

The blood flowed again in quick jets, and a shudder convulsed the frame as the strong vital energy, still alive within the apparently dead body, again asserted itself. Fortunately the passenger, who had been a chemist, had sufficient sense

and skill to tie the cut artery ; and plenty of cold water dashed on the face, and a tumbler of strong wine poured down the throat, did the rest, and before midnight the wounded officer was able to sit up and take some food, which he urgently needed to strengthen the system reduced to the last stage of weakness by loss of blood.

For hours he was so weak as scarcely to be able to speak, but towards morning, after a quiet sleep, his strength and energy seemed to revive within him, and he was able to rise and get about shortly after sunrise.

Helen Vandaleur sat at a little distance from him all the time he slept, gazing down into his face with loving, earnest eyes. She knew now all the details of his rescuing her ; she knew that it was his hand which had cut the cruel rope which encircled her neck, that it was in his arms she was borne aft, and placed in safety.

She knew, too, that in saving her he had been seized himself, and received a wound which nearly proved his death. Knowing all this, her gratitude and newly-awakened love were unbounded. What, then, was her grief and dismay, when she perceived that he looked coldly upon her on awaking from unconsciousness ?

At first she persuaded herself that he was bewildered, stupefied by the effects of the blow, and did not recognise her, and she suffered him to drop off to sleep without speaking to him. But when morning came, and she saw him rise, bathe his face, take a cup of coffee and brandy, and move about the cabin with unsteady step, it is true, but still without difficulty, she could no longer restrain herself.

Going up to him as he was about to ascend the companion-way, she stood before him, and, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, said, in a tremulous voice—

“ Oh, Mr. Royston, I am so glad to see you are better. Pray be careful, and do not exert yourself too much.”

Her voice, her manner, the loving look in her sweet eyes, might have melted a stone. But, strange to say, they failed to melt the heart of Simon Royston. He had not forgotten her scornful words ; he was peevish, ill-tempered, and his head pained him terribly. Perhaps, had he been quite calm and collected, he might have met her advances in a similar

spirit. He was angry, irritated, and heart-sore. He remembered that he had got his wound, which might have been fatal, and all but incapacitated him from exertion just when it was most needed, in saving her.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ROYSTON HOISTS SIGNALS OF DISTRESS.

“SAIL HO !”

As the joyful cry was repeated from one to the other down in that dark, dingy cabin, it seemed as though a flood of bright light had suddenly been poured on the scene. Some laughed, some cried. The ladies both wept and embraced each other, and the men passengers seemed inclined to cheer.

“Sail ho !”

It seemed certain that all their troubles were over to these too sanguine people. Royston, however, knew better. He was quite aware that the ringleader, Death's Head Dick, would make the most desperate attempt to prevent any communication between the Thunder and the strange sail.

With the mutineers it was a matter of life and death. Anything, everything, would be risked, even another desperate assault on the cabin stronghold, rather than that they should speak the vessel in sight. Simon the Sailor was fully convinced of this, and so did not look on the sighting of the sail as certain and easy safety for them all, but rather as the signal for the commencement of a fresh, and, perhaps, severer struggle, than any heretofore.

Night was closing in on the scene. This made their chance of getting close enough to the vessel to speak her, either by the voice or signals, a matter of much greater difficulty and doubt.

The shot fired at the man at the helm, and the one following, aimed at himself, might soon have convinced anybody who did not already know it, that if powder and lead



could stop communication between the Thunder and the sail in the horizon, none should be held.

Our hero, however, now greatly recovered from his wound, and inspirited in some degree by the news of the vessel in sight, was determined to speak her, and to spare neither toil, risk, nor, if necessary, bloodshed, to attain that object. After a long, steady look at the strange sail through a powerful telescope, an advantage over those forward, he made her out to be a large vessel, sailing a course about two points further south than they were steering.

The result of this would be, that should both vessels stand on in the same direction, they would gradually approach each other, drawing nearer and nearer every moment, until at the last, the two courses would intersect, the fastest sailor of the two passing ahead of the other. Under such circumstances, the vessel could not fail to approach within a mile or two of each other—easy signalling distance.

Having command, however, of the flags and the aftermast, Royston determined, cost what it might, to hoist signals of distress, if ever the vessel came within signalling distance. In order, however, to bring the two ships together sooner, the young commander resolved to haul his wind, if possible, scarcely hoping to be allowed to do so without opposition.

So soon as he had given the order, "Starboard the helm," he got all the party on deck, keeping well in shelter, with the exception of the two sentinels, whom it was impossible to spare. With the others he proceeded to set the spanker, which could be done without going aloft. The next thing was to brace up the mizenyards, and these two measures had such an effect as to cause the ship to come up quite three points nearer the wind. But scarcely had this been settled to his satisfaction, than he heard the voice of Death's Head Dick—

"Set the flying jib, foretopgallant sail and royal, and the foretopmast staysail!"

Unfortunately all these sails could be got at, loosed and set, without any of the men doing so exposing their bodies to the sight of those in the cabin. Simon the Sailor watched those manœuvres being accomplished with a good deal of anxiety, unable as he was to prevent them. Great, then,

was his satisfaction when he found that, despite the increased spread of canvas forward, she could still be kept up to the wind in obedience to the helm.

There was a pause—a few minutes of inaction—during which, by the fading light, each party anxiously watched the course of the Thunder and the position of the strange sail. The latter was seen broad on the port bow, and long before the sun would again rise, they must in all probability be close together.

The silent, the deadly stillness forward, was disquieting and suspicious.

“I wonder what those spawn of Satan are up to now,” Royston remarked anxiously to Ezra Tanner, whom he now rightly looked on as the very best man of the lot.

“Reckon they’re flabbergasted—don’t know what to be up to,” replied the big horsebreaker, gleefully.

“I am afraid not. That Dick Smith is as cunning as he is murderous and cruel. Depend upon it, he is scheming something.”

There now ensued some moments of anxious suspense. Those who watched keenly and understood, could gather something was going on forward, though they could not see, by reason of the mainsail, the barricade on the break of the poop, and the necessity for keeping out of sight and reach of bullets. Ropes were seen to move, and the creaking of blocks was heard.

“What the blazes are they up to now?” remarked one of the unwounded sailors. “Some infernal hanky-panky on the foremast or other.”

“The Lord only knows,” said Royston, gloomily. “If I could only tell what they are doing, we might have a chance of defeating them.”

“Brace the foreyards sharp up!” was heard suddenly in the harsh, grating voice of the ringleader.

“Look out, lads!” cried Royston, excitedly; “they can’t do it unless we let them. They can’t get at the forebraces without showing themselves to our fire. Shoot ’em down!”

“Can’t we, though!” yelled Death’s Head Dick, laughing tauntingly at the same time. “You shall see. Much obliged for your kind intention all the same, Sir Second Mate.”

Then some hastened to take up a position where they could fire on anybody attempting to touch the forebraces, both of which led down into the waist, the fore topmast and topgallant braces running down alongside the mainmast.

Royston, as he gazed, saw to his dismay all these braces suddenly slacken, and fall in a bight.

"They've cut the braces," said Royston. "It's a wonder the yards didn't go. Lucky there ain't more wind."

The immediate result from this move was soon apparent. Hidden from view themselves, carefully keeping out of sight, and avoiding the deck almost entirely, the mutineers were able to work the sails on the foremast, and bowsprit and jibboom without difficulty.

Before cutting the fore braces, which led down on to the quarter-deck, Death's Head Dick had caused others to be rose, leading out to the jibboom end. By means of these he was able to brace the head-yards sharp up.

Royston watched the movement with dismay, and as she felt the pressure of so much canvas almost flat fore and aft, and gradually payed off from the wind, he gave a half sigh, half groan. He waited for a short time to see if she would answer her helm, and come up nearer to the wind. But with the present trim of her sails it was impossible, and now the strange sail, instead of being broad on the bow, was on the quarter, and they were obviously sailing away from her. Sailing away from what seemed their only hope of safety, and just, too, as it had become certain that the two vessels were approaching each other, and would come much closer.

No wonder that the hearts of those beleaguered few sank within them. Such as were not seamen saw, and could realise the fact, that the mutineers had so arranged the sails forward that the vessel could not be kept on her former course. Those who had nautical experience, knew also the almost irresistible power of such a force of forward sail braced sharp up.

"We must do our best," said Royston, as cheerfully as he could. "We must make all possible sail aft to help the rudder, and pray that the wind may shift further to the west. To-night we must fight our foe, **not with steel and lead only, but with rope and canvas too.**"

In a few minutes more, darkness closed in the scene, and the sail on the horizon was lost to view.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## ON THE LOOK-OUT.

THAT night was spent in ceaseless labour, and in desperate endeavours on behalf of the cabin party, under the guidance of Royston, to get all possible after sail on the ship, and so counteract the bad work of the mutineers forward. At times they would gain a little, and get her head a point or two to windward, but these advantages were always transitory.

Sails had been spread across the rigging and all along the poop half-way up the shrouds, and for a time the effect was marked. But for every stitch of fresh canvas they spread, the mutineers could reply to double as much, so that, in the long run, the second mate feared that they were sailing far away to leeward of the strange vessel's course.

Indeed, although he did not tell his thoughts, he had very little hope of the result. Now and again, the wind showed signs of wavering and shifting further to the westward. Herein lay their best chance, for, if it should make a haul that way of three or four points the vessel could also, of course, be steered the same number of points nearer the course of the other vessel, which, as she was presumably bound on a voyage, would remain the same—that is to say, if no other and stronger measures were taken by the mutineers to make the ship pay off further from the wind.

All these hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment. The wind baffled and shifted for a minute or so, but soon came back again, and, at last, even drew yet further to the northward. The desperate eagerness, therefore, with which morning was looked for, may therefore, perhaps, be imagined.

Some pictured to themselves a stately ship, heavily armed and manned, close alongside, ready to rescue them from their terrible predicament, and execute stern justice on the wrong-

doers ; while others, more thoughtful and considerate, had but little hope at all. Amongst these was Simon Royston, who, having watched the ship's course keenly all night, almost despaired of seeing the faintest glimpse of the sail of the evening before.

At last the grey dawn began to break slowly. It was hazy and misty, and threatened rain, and it was not until the sun rose, dispelling some of the cold night vapours with his warm rays, that any clear view could be got at all of the wide expanse of sea.

The mutineers were as keenly on the look-out as the cabin party, and doubtless, if a ship had appeared anywhere close at hand, a desperate struggle would instantly have commenced ; for we have said that Death's Head Dick had determined, at all costs, to prevent communication, while Royston was as firmly and desperately bent on hoisting signals of distress.

Forward, they had no telescope, but the young officer slowly, carefully, deliberately swept the horizon. All waited to hear the joyful words, "Sail ho !" if only whispered instead of shouted. Anxiously all eyes not on duty bent, were turned on Simon Royston as he slowly swept the horizon.

So that there should be no possible mistake, he ordered the vessel to be kept off several points, thus enabling him to see right ahead. At last the telescope had completely swept the whole horizon. But there came no sign from the second mate that he had discovered the sail of the previous night. Especially to leeward did he search, as then the mutineers could not help them running the Thunder in the desired direction.

The press of head sail, which gave them so great an advantage, and prevented her head being brought to the wind, would have the effect of making her pay off and run free more readily. And they had the command of the after sails ; so, if indeed the lost sail should be discovered to leeward, there was at least a fair chance of being able to run down to her.

But this, as Royston and some few others knew right well, could only be after a desperate, probably a sanguinary and murderous struggle.

The mutineers were now so far committed that to be made prisoners must be fatal. All had joined in the crime of piracy and murder, and all, if brought to justice, must suffer the penalty.

This was the one strong point by which Death's Head Dick kept in some sort of subordination the violent, cruel, ruthless men he commanded.

Once more the second mate's telescope swept the horizon. There seemed to be a truce by tacit consent on both sides until the all important point should be decided. Sail or no sail? A second time the glass went round from south to west, then to north, round by east, and back again to south. Still the young officer spoke no word. The sad, gloomy look on his face was, however, enough to tell the news.

Once, even once more, to make assurance doubly sure, he went over the same ground. Then, when he had finished, he slowly closed the telescope, and said—

“Not a speck that could be taken for a sail in sight.”

Then, after giving a few brief directions to Ezra Tanner, whom he had now installed as his second in command, he went below, for he was worn out with pain, fatigue, and watching.

A dismal scene—dismal sounds awaited him. The unhappy lady passengers, the evening before buoyed up with hope, were now sunk in the depths of despair. They knew soon enough that the ship, the haven of safety they had so fondly hoped to see close by that morning, had disappeared in the night. Once more they were alone with their misery, and gave vent to their despair in heart-broken wailing and weeping.

Royston presently sank to sleep, despite the close atmosphere of the gloomy, darkened cabin, the sickening smell of blood, impossible to get rid of, and all the other horrors.

After a sleep of some two hours, he was awakened suddenly, and started to his feet. The cry which had aroused him was this—

“Land, ho!”



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## PLOTTING MISCHIEF.

THE leader of the murderous gang who had possession of the deck-house, and all the fore part of the vessel, was, perhaps, the only one of the lot who grasped the true state of affairs in all its bearings. He alone knew the immense danger they ran in falling in with a ship. He alone had decided, had settled absolutely in his own mind, that nothing but the murder of every soul on board, except those he could thoroughly depend on, could save his own life.

He knew that not only the road to the treasure, but the road to their own safety, lay over the dead bones of those who were not of the gang. He realised fully the rigorous and damaging part to them which the second mate had so well played, and bitterly cursed his ill luck in the matter of Helen's escape.

He knew right well that things must, at this crisis, be pushed on rapidly. What was to be done must be done quickly. And yet, turn and twist how he would, he could not hit on any plan which quite pleased him. There were two of which he thought of putting into execution, both of them dangerous.

One was to set fire to the ship and put on all head sail, so that the flames would be blown aft, and burn or drive overboard those unhappy ones who now sought shelter in the cabin. But then there was the desperate contingency that they might not be able themselves to put out the fire which they had lighted, when it had done all they wanted. Even if they succeeded in saving their own lives in the boats, would the flames give them time to secure the gold?

These were the questions which continually suggested themselves to him whenever he thought of this first project.

The other plan was not of quite so desperate a nature. Still, in face of such a vigilant and determined foe he could not but be dismayed. It was to burrow away under the deck—among the cargo—as rapidly and noiselessly as possible,

and make a rush up into the cabin, through the store-room hatch.

There were serious difficulties in the way. In the first place they would have to traverse the whole length of the main and after holds. This must be a work of great labour. Then there was the danger of their being heard, and getting a very warm reception in place of effecting a surprise. And, lastly, if they could get unseen and unheard to the lazaretto-hatch, there was the brass gun, which the second mate had showed him, to be accounted for. He fully believed—knew, in fact, as far as it was possible—that it was kept loaded and pointed down the hold, in instant readiness to be fired, and blow a hole in the vessel beneath the water line.

But Death's Head Dick had some hope that, in the confusion of a sudden attack from below, that the cannon would not be fired—the man in charge might lose nerve, and fail to do as ordered. Royston himself might at the last moment decide to fight it out, and not take so desperate a step until certain that all was lost.

And when this last thought occurred the mutineer persuaded himself that it would be too late, and that the little cannon—a terrible cause of annoyance to him—would have gone out of the control of the cabin party.

"It was a very different thing," he said to himself, "retreating step by step, fighting foot by foot, with nothing but despair and death in prospect—fighting when every man must know it was for life itself, and that there was no hope of mercy."

It was in such supreme and terrible moments as these Dick Smith said to himself that many did such desperate deeds as blowing themselves up, sinking ships with all hands, and so forth.

Taking all in all, the cunning ruffian decided that this plan must be tried, and if from any reason it should fail, then more desperate means must be put in force. He calculated that it would take only a few hours to get aft to the store-room, which was immediately below the cuddy or cabin.

Already he had succeeded in getting water—a matter of vital importance. Meanwhile he came to the resolve that until they got full possession of the ship, the less she sailed



the better, as she would not be so likely to meet other craft.

Accordingly, so soon as he was well assured that the strange sail was no longer in sight, he reduced sail forward to the foretopsail and jib, only hauling up the foresail, and letting it hang in the brails.

This proceeding rendered it necessary to take in sail aft also, as, with such a press of canvas astern, and scarce any forward, it became very difficult to steer her.

All the while the desperate struggle was progressing, Royston kept one object in view; that was to steer the Thunder across the track of out and homeward-bound vessels in the direction of the South American coast. He also caused two lower studding-sails to be got in readiness to heave overboard after dark, and keep in tow.

Meanwhile he went ahead at the work down in the hold with a will, putting on more men, and lending a hand himself. The toil was most exhausting, the heat and closeness of the atmosphere being very oppressive. The light of the one small lantern they had with them was not sufficient to illuminate the whole length of the tunnel. However, the work went on rapidly. Cases were broken up and dragged out of the way, contents and all, piecemeal. Bales were cut open, and the wool pulled out bit by bit, until the whole pack could be taken away. Casks and barrels were stored in packages, moved, and when they came on any very ponderous object they made a half circle, and went round it.

Dick Smith did not know the exact distance from the fore-hatch to the store-room under the cabin, and of course it was not possible for him to take measure. He could, however, guess pretty nearly how far he had got, having passed both the main and after hatches. He knew they must be getting pretty close to the store-room bulk-head, and therefore was not surprised when, on moving two of a tier of deal cases, he beheld a solid bulk-head. That this was the partition between the after part of the 'tween decks and the store-room, he had very little doubt. The cases contained bottles of Australian wine—the first product of the colonial grapes ever sent. Nothing could prevent the two men at

work with him from breaking the necks off several of these and draining their contents.

"It's a blessing it wasn't rum," Dick said to himself, after taking a fair draught of the wine. "It'll take a deal of this stuff to make 'em drunk, and they'd have guzzled just as much if it was the strongest spirit ever drawn."

The two men, after finishing several bottles, crawled back along the narrow, dark tunnel, taking some to their mates above.

Death's Head Dick was now left alone with the lantern, by the light of which they worked. There were tools in abundance—chisel, gimlets, auger, centre-bit, iron bars—everything necessary for such a task as they had been engaged on.

He at once set to work, bored a hole, enlarged it with a chisel, and then commenced to saw a piece out of the bulk-head. This was ticklish work, and the utmost caution and quiet were necessary, for it was impossible to see what might be on the other side.

Cursing the drunken obstinacy of the men, who had left him to do all the work alone, he toiled on steadily and surely, and in less than half an hour had sawn a square piece big enough to admit a man's body out of the bulk-head. Then, carefully removing the piece, he put his head in and reconnoitred.

The cabin itself in its barricaded state was dark enough, and as the hatch was small, the light in the store-room was of the dimmest. But by what there was and the lantern he made out the arrangement of the place to his entire satisfaction. He had even crawled through the hole, and was about to prosecute his researches further forward, when he heard a voice shouting, as it appeared, at the other end of the tunnel.

"Land ho ! land ho ! land ho !"

The voice came nearer and nearer. The man was approaching.

"Confound it !" muttered Dick, between his teeth ; "the drunken fools ! They'll be heard in the cabin as sure as death, if there's any one close to the hatch."

Then he made all possible haste, scrambled back, and

replaced the square of wood he had sawn out. So great was his hurry that, as he scrambled through himself, he dropped the lantern, which fell into the store-room down between the casks, and was extinguished.

Fearing lest the noise should have been heard, he hastened to put the square piece of bulkhead he had sawn out back in its place, knocking it in with a smart blow of a hammer—a highly dangerous and thoughtless proceeding, for which he instantly blamed himself, and resolved to be more cautious in future. Then he made the best of his way along the tunnel and up on deck!

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### ROYSTON MAKES A DISCOVERY.

ON hearing the cry of “Land ho!” the first impulse of the second mate of the Thunder was to rush up on deck and see for himself, without guarding against exposing himself to the view of the enemy.

However, he remembered the danger in time, and controlling his impatience, crept on his hands and knees under shelter of the barricade at the break of the poop to the lee side, and cautiously reconnoitred. His eye soon fell upon the land which had evoked the cry.

Yes, there it was undoubtedly—high, rough, rugged land, apparently about thirty miles away.

“What land could it possibly be?”

He had kept the ship’s reckoning pretty correctly, and though he might be in some slight error with regard to longitude, he was certain his latitude was correct; and there was no land marked on the chart anywhere about those regions.

However, there it was plain enough visible, and he had to form some opinion as to what land it could be. It lay hard on the lee-bow, and the vessel was sailing down towards it at the rate of five or six knots. It was probable they would soon be in soundings, and possibly that they were so already.

The deep-sea lead. He would take a cast, and endeavour to form some idea as to the land they were approaching by the nature of the bottom, and the depth of water. The deep-sea lead was down in the store-room, and Royston, thinking he could find it in the dark, went down.

Just before he did so, he heard a noise as of the falling of some heavy body. When he landed on some bags of rice just under the hatch, he thought he caught the momentary gleam of a light. He stood still and listened. He heard distinctly a harsh sound, as of two pieces of wood grating together.

"Oh, rats," he said to himself. The next moment, however, there was a sharp tap, as with a hammer on wood.

"That could not have been rats," he said, and stood silent and motionless listening intently. But no other sound rewarded his patience. A curious smell, however, he soon noticed—a smell as of an oil lamp extinguished; he had brought no lamp with him, so that could not be the cause.

After waiting a little longer, he put his head up the hatch, and called for a lantern. Ezra Tanner was standing close by in charge of the cannon, for Royston kept it in readiness to be fired at a moment's notice, thoroughly determined to sink the ship, rather than be made prisoners by the mutineers.

"Ezra," said Royston, "call the steward to take your place at the gun, and come down here with a lantern. There's something wrong—something in the wind—though I don't know what."

Ezra soon got a light, and then swung himself down the hatch. They both stood silent and still for some time, and listened. The dull flame of the oil just gave sufficient light to render visible a space of a yard or two all round them. By the muffled daylight which found entrance through the cabin, they could see the muzzle of the brass cannon ominously gaping down on them.

Royston, with his pale face, and head enveloped in blood-streaked bandages, looked like some phantom from the grave, rather than flesh and blood; and even the strong-framed, iron-limbed Ezra, looked haggard and weary, his eyes sunken and bloodshot. Nor was it to be wondered at,

considering the terrible ordeal they had all passed through, or rather were still in the thick of, for as yet there was no dawn of hope.

After waiting for some time without hearing anything, Simon the Sailor said to the big horse-breaker, pointing to the muzzle of the brass cannon—

“Ezra, I’m afraid it’ll come to that at last; she’ll be our best friend, that little piece of brass.”

“What! you think you will have to blow a hole in her and sink her to prevent us from falling into their hands?”

“I’m afraid so,” was the gloomy reply. “You see everything is against us—strength, spirits, energy; and in the case of some of us, even courage seems to fail now that we have most desperate need of all.”

“Never mind, mate; hope for the best. I don’t fear, and the Lord be praised. You keep up a strong heart, or I don’t know where we shall be.”

“Ah, my friend,” replied Simon, sadly, “it isn’t the heart, it’s the body that fails me. I’m all but done; haven’t got the strength of a child—of no more use in a tussle than a kitten.”

“Never mind, my boy,” said Ezra, cheerfully, “the head’s all right; the brain that has guided us safe through all our perils heretofore is as clear and bright as ever. As for me—”

“Hush!” whispered Royston, suddenly grasping him by the arm. “What is that?”

“I hear nothing. Yet I do—forward—noises as though from the hold.”

“Come along, let’s get forward to the bulk-head. Bring the lantern quickly and carefully.”

With surprising agility, considering his wounds and weakness, the second mate made his way across the store-room, clambering over boxes, casks, bags, and stores of all kinds as best he could. Ezra followed with the lantern, and they were now close to the place where Death’s Head Dick had sawn out a square and replaced it.

Royston was now thoroughly on the alert, his hearing and eyesight, strange to say, seemed to be rendered preternaturally acute, as he heard and saw what entirely escaped Ezra Tanner.

"What's that down there, between those two casks?" he asked. "Ezra, you can reach down with your long arm. I'll hold the light."

"Another lantern, by all that's holy," said Ezra, in a low tone, as he fished up the one the mutineer had dropped.

"By heavens! the rim round the wick is still hot," said Simon, in a hoarse whisper. "Some one has been here within the last minute or so. But how? that's the question."

"Not by the cabin, I'll swear," said Ezra, "for I've been there at the gun the last two hours."

"Hold the lantern this way—close up to the bulk-head. Ha! now we've got it."

Royston had discovered the square piece sawn out and replaced in the bulk-head.

"Good heavens! what a danger we have escaped! They must have burrowed through the hold, and so got aft here. One of them's been in to reconnoitre, dropped his lantern, and beat a retreat. They'll be back in force soon, and try a sudden rush up the hatch. If we hadn't happened to find this out, they must have taken us by surprise, and most likely overpowered us, and not given a chance even to fire the gun and blow a hole in her side."

"Hark! here they come."

"What shall we do? Shall I go up and fetch some more of the chaps?"

"There's no time. They're close here. Besides, I think it's only one or two; Dick Smith and another, perhaps, to take a look round, and arrange for the grand attack."

Voices were now heard quite close on the other side, and Royston sunk his own to a whisper.

"It's the ringleader himself," whispered Royston. "If we can only make him prisoner, the game is ours. Have you got your pistols?"

"No, worse luck."

"Never mind, I've got mine. Now, look out. You keep close on one side of this piece of wood sawn out; I'll stand on the other. He'll take it down directly, I expect, and put his head through to look about; then grab him, and drag him through. I'll keep the other one off with my pistols. Out with the light."

The square piece of wood was seen to move and quiver as though some one was prizing it out on the other side.

Ezra Tanner blew out the lantern, and drew back on his side. Royston did likewise. A half minute afterwards the sawn-out portion of the bulk-head was quietly withdrawn, and the cadaverous, churchyard-face of Death's Head Dick, was seen in the aperture by the dim light of a lantern.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### MUTINEERS IN COUNCIL.

DEATH'S HEAD DICK, on hearing the cry, "Land ho!" at once realised the importance of the discovery, and made all haste to the look-out place, or crow's-nest, on top of the deck-house, whence he could command a good view of the sea.

He was not long in making out the land, which was plainly enough visible on the lee-bow to even a landsman's eye. He had neither charts nor the precise nautical knowledge possessed by the second mate, and so, though he wondered what land this could be, did not feel so completely puzzled and at a loss as did Royston. But he knew, however, that it was a serious matter, and necessitated serious action: he thought most likely it might be islands off the South American coast; some of the Guano Islands, perhaps.

But at all events it was probable there might be a port, and that ships called, some, perhaps, lying in the harbour, or near about, at that very time. He hastily called together his two lieutenants, and a few others on whom he relied, and laid the matter before them.

"It's just this, lads. There's the land on our lee bow; the ship's bearing down towards it. We can't keep her from it so long as those chaps have got possession aft and work the helm. All we can do is to stop her way as much as possible, and that ain't enough. There's pretty sure to be ships somewhere about, and once they get up a signal of

distress, and it's seen by another vessel, it's all over with us. So that's just how the case stands."

"What's to be done?" growled the Baltimore Buck. "Run our heads butt up against the cabin again, and be driven back after two or three of us have been shot down as we were before?"

"By no means; that won't wash. They're too well armed and barricaded, and keep too good a look-out."

"Well, then," said another, "what are we to be up to? Seems to me things is looking queer."

By these and other remarks the mutineer ringleader plainly saw that his gang were not by any means in high spirits—not in a good humour for a desperate enterprise. Nevertheless, it was a case of work or nothing. Plainly he perceived that every hour's delay gave the cabin party a better chance of aid and rescue. If they could only hold out as they had hitherto done, they must undoubtedly win. So he spoke again—

"No, lads; I don't propose anything of the sort. Luck's been against us so far, now I think it's taken a turn in our favour. We've struck this store-room bulk-head at last."

"Sure it's the store-room?"

"Rather," said Dick, with an air of triumph, "considering I've sawed a piece right out, and been in and looked round."

"Well, then, I suppose the best thing we can do is just to go down, crawl about the tunnel, and get into the store-room, all the lot of us, and then make a rush of it up into the cabin."

"That's just it; but, before we make the attempt, I should just like to have another bit of squint round, so as to make certain as to the ground, and the height of the hatch, from the stores, and so on. You, Bill, get the chaps together, talk to 'em a bit, and make 'em up all ready for themuss. Baltimore and I will go down, and be back in a few minutes. Now's our chance, lads. If the ship ain't our own, and all those coves' throats cut in half an hour, it's our own fault."

Death's Head Dick and his second in command, then got another lantern, and proceeded down the hold to see all clear and ready for the intended attack. Meanwhile, the



whole gang, with the exception of one man on the look-out in the crow's-nest, gathered together, and Boston Bill proceeded to explain the state of affairs, and what was proposed to be done.

A repulsive and hideous rabble they looked, as they clustered around the speaker in the dark and gloomy deck-house. They were in their shirts and trousers only ; one or two only had any head covering, save a handkerchief, many stained and dotted with blood. All were dirty, unkempt, and uncouth-looking, with beards and hair innocent of brush or comb.

One or two were badly wounded, as their groans and muttered curses, when they moved, told. One half at least had received slight hurts or bruises of some kind, and altogether a more fierce, savage, and brutal set of men it would be difficult to imagine.

The atmosphere of the deck house was fearful. In addition to the foul smells consequent on a number of men being jammed into so small a place, there was the horrible, sickening smell of blood plainly distinguishable above all other odours.

Surly growls went round this ghastly group as Boston Bill finished telling them of the intention of Death's Head Dick to attack the cabin party at once. They were in no very great spirits for the task, being much demoralised and disheartened by repeated failures, and the death and wounding of so many of their number. But they had sense enough to perceive what Death's Head Dick had so constantly impressed upon them, that they must win or else lose their own lives. They knew, too, that time was all-important, and that they were in continual danger of being overhauled by some ship.

So, almost immediately after Boston Bill had finished, there was a movement among them, and the clanking of cutlasses, the clicking of pistol locks, the gleam of deadly-looking sheath-knives, and such-like sights and sounds, proclaimed that the murderous gang were preparing for another desperate assault. They only waited for Dick Smith. In five minutes all were ready, and, primed with wine and rum, seemed eager for the coming conflict.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## THE MUTINEERS MEET WITH A REPULSE.

DICK SMITH made his way along the tunnel through the cargo, carrying the light, followed by the Baltimore Buck. When he got to the bulk-head, he commenced at once to gently prize the square piece he had sawn out, so as to remove it. This was not done at once, as he was exceedingly careful to make no noise.

The Baltimore Buck, meanwhile, amused himself by knocking the neck off one of the bottles of wine, and draining the contents. After about a minute's work, the piece of wood was loosened.

"Now, then, Balty," said Dick, in a low whisper, "I'm just going to take this timber down, and go in and have a look round, so as to know the road. Catch hold of the lantern.

Now at the same moment he moved away the piece of loose bulk-head, and the store-room was opened to his gaze.

Royston and Ezra Tanner, as the reader knows, were also there, and had a light. But it had been placed deep down between two barrels, and the stronger glare of that carried by the mutineers (for the Baltimore Buck did not show great alacrity in taking it, being busy on a second bottle of wine), prevented his noticing it. He put his head in, and peered cautiously round. The Baltimore Buck not having taken hold of the lantern as requested, he placed it down close to the bulk-head.

The moment was one of intense and absolutely breathless suspense to the two watchers.

The shoulders and arms of the mutineer followed the head. In order to have his hands free, he had placed his pistol in his belt, and held a sheath-knife between his teeth.

It was the intention of our friend Simon to allow him to enter the store-room, and then for Ezra suddenly to fall upon him, and either disable him by a blow on the head, or secure him completely, just as seemed most convenient.

Death's Head Dick now leaned his chest on the bottom of the hole in the bulk-head, and putting his hand on some cases in the store-room, seemed in the very act of crawling. But at that moment of intense suspense, Ezra Tanner, getting quite ready to throw himself upon the villain, slightly moved.

That slight move caused the cask on which he stood to roll over, whereby, for the moment, he lost his balance. Of course this was accompanied by considerable noise. Death's Head Dick instantly took alarm, and drew back.

Ezra recovered himself almost instantly, and just as the villain drew his head and shoulders back both he and Royston made a grab at him. The second mate was weak, and misjudged his distance, but Ezra succeeded in seizing him by the collar.

"I've got him," he shouted, tugging with all his might. "Come in here, you skunk, you."

The prisoner, the instant he heard the noise, turned his head sharply, and saw one of the two lying in wait for him, was fully aware of his peril. He yelled aloud for help, and struggled most desperately to prevent his being dragged through the hole by Tanner.

"Lay hold o' me, Balty! Catch hold o' me! Quick! he's dragging me into the store-room! Help! help! Forward there!"

Ezra, exerting his immense strength, and aided by Royston, was slowly pulling the mutineer into the store-room, despite the desperate struggles of the latter. And he would certainly have succeeded in doing so in another second or so, but just then the Baltimore Buck clapped on, and being a big, strong man, greatly retarded further progress.

"Haul away—haul with a will!" shouted Ezra. "Come he must, if it's in little pieces! Tear the scoundrel to bits! In he comes! Come down some of you fellows and lend a hand."

Mr. Richard Smith, now fairly dragged half way into the store-room, nearly choked, and in desperate terror, struggled harder than ever: he could see and hear dark figures of men dropping down the hatch, and crawling over the stores towards where the struggle raged. Should one of them reach

him before he could be extricated from the iron-like grasp of Tanner, it must turn the scale. He would be torn from the hold of the Buck, and left in the power of those from whom he could expect no mercy.

Knowing this, and with the terror of certain death before him, he writhed and struggled as might one of the souls of those in Hades. Still he was slowly dragged in, inch by inch.

All at once Ezra Tanner gave a desperate and tremendous snatch, and to great effect. Resistance suddenly yielded, and he staggered back, so sudden was it. Yet as it happened, his last effort had torn away the whole upper part of the villain's woollen shirt, by which he had hold. He fell back with the stuff in his hands, and the mutineer, availing himself promptly of the opportunity, scrambled back through the hole.

## CHAPTER XL.

### HANGING A MUTINEER.

WHEN Tanner went back with part of the shirt in his hand, Royston had hold of the mutineer by his arm, but in his enfeebled state was unable to hold on, though he delayed the escape for a moment or so.

Ezra, however, quickly recovered, and made a dash at the opening, but just too late to grab his escaped prisoner. Furious and excited, he threw himself forward with equal bravery and rashness, and commenced to follow Smith. Scarcely had he got his head and shoulders through, when he was attacked by the Buck, who hit him across the head with a full bottle; the bottle broke, and the wine deluged his head, face, and neck, but beyond a momentary stunning feeling did him no other harm; for, by good fortune, he had on one of those thick caps lined with wool, called by sailors Elsinore caps, almost as good a protection against a blow as a helmet.

Nothing daunted by this, Ezra seized the Buck by the

throat, and throwing all his great strength into one desperate tug, he hauled him close to the hole. Then crawling backwards himself, still holding his prisoner in a grasp of iron, he shouted—

“ Pull away, boys ! Catch hold of my legs some of you fellows ! I’ve got one of ’em—pull him through ! Now he comes—yo ! heave ho ! ”

Several pairs of hands now had hold of Ezra, and with addition to his own great strength, the case of the Buck was a desperate one. In another moment, with a shout of triumph, Ezra hauled the big mutineer into the store-room, his body falling on the case inside.

The instant this was done, Royston, who had been watching his opportunity, fired his pistol into the aperture again and again until all the barrels were empty. A yell told him that he had succeeded in hitting some of them. They had begun to flock into the tunnel to the assistance of their leader ; but when the bullets, whistling along the dark passage and wounding one of their number, told them again that the defenders of the cabin were ready to give them a warm reception, they beat a hasty retreat, leaving their comrade, second in command, in the hands of the enemy.

This was a sore discouragement to the mutineers, and even Death’s Head Dick looked gloomy and scared. It seemed as though two men had been especially put on board to defeat all his plans, and hurl them back bruised and bleeding from every attempt.

Simon Royston, with his cool head, great resolution, and skilful leadership, was one ; Ezra Tanner, with his great strength, and equally dauntless courage, the other. These two men had between them been the cause of all the disasters and bad luck which had befallen them.

Dick Smith gnashed his teeth, and swore inwardly that now he would resort to his last and most desperate plan—fire the ship, and burn them out, running the risk of being able to extinguish it, or get the gold. Things had now got to such a desperate pass, that there was nothing for it but a desperate remedy. Meanwhile the Buck was quickly secured by handcuffing behind his back, and passed up into the cabin.

"What are you going to do with me?" he growled, as he looked around him, after a few moments.

"Do with you?" replied Royston, with the utmost coolness, "why hang you presently. We've other things to attend to now; but I daresay I shall find time to run you up in the course of the afternoon."

The ruffian's blood ran cold, and he glanced around in abject terror on the white sullen countenances he saw. He read in no one any sign of pity, or hope of mercy, for all had suffered too much to feel any towards one of their would-be murderers. Even the women, the poor, frightened, timid ladies, looked on the captive mutineer with more of hatred than of fear or horror.

And, marking all this, knowing what would have been the fate of one of his captors if the case had been reversed, he felt a shivering horror creep over his frame. He turned sick, faint, and ghastly white, and knew that his doom was sealed.

Royston had said, quite calmly and quietly, that he was to be hanged when they had time, and though, perhaps, he would not actually have carried out his threat, those present, even the prisoner, believed him.

"If you go down below with what men you want," said Ezra Tanner to Royston, "and make all secure, I'll look after this fellow, and the steward can stand by the gun."

"A couple of men will be enough for me," replied Royston. "I shall barricade the passage they've made with cases and some pig-iron there is down amongst the stores, and leave a loophole, so that we can keep a watch into the tunnel they've made. I reckon that will be safer than blocking it up altogether. We shall have to keep a sentry down there, night and day—that's the worst of it; but beyond the loss of one man, whom we can ill spare, it will be perfectly safe."

Accordingly, Royston went down and superintended the barricading of the opening of the tunnel, making it strong enough to resist an assault for some time, so that long before it could be forced, the fire of the defenders would have done its work. In about half an hour this was done, and leaving

one man with a loaded rifle as sentry, Royston, thoroughly weary, went on deck.

"Now, about this land," he said. "We must be a good deal nearer it by this time. I don't think those murderous scoundrels will trouble us much more to day. Would to Heaven it had been Richard Smith himself that we had captured! That, I fancy, would have decided the affair in our favour."

When he reached the cabin, he saw Ezra Tanner, but not the prisoner.

"What have you done with that ruffian?" he asked.

"He's up under the mizen-top."

"I don't understand you."

"Go up and see."

Royston did so, a good deal bewildered. When he reached the deck he looked up, and there, hanging by the neck, under the cross-jack yard, he beheld the Baltimore Buck—a corpse

'You said we'd hang him when you had time, so some of us set to work, did the job right off, while you were down below. Hope it will do the eyesight of the others good.'

They had taken Royston at his word.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### AN APPEAL FOR THE CORPSE.

SIMON ROYSTON was a good deal staggered at this rough justice. For a moment, flushed and excited, he had really thought of hanging the prisoner as a just punishment for his crimes, and to strike terror into the others. But, on consideration, he had decided not to do so, resolving to keep him prisoner, and should they come successfully through this adventure to hand him over to the proper authorities.

Ezra Tanner, however, had seen something of Lynch-law, and feeling certain that this was a case in which it might rightly be applied, he proceeded to carry out the execution.

The sailors and the male passengers lent a hand, and the women did not interfere.

A rope was now reeved through a block under the cross-jack yard, the prisoner taken up the companion-way, and held there while the noose was passed round his neck. The rest was soon done ; half a dozen got hold of the rope, which was let down into the cabin, and then up went the Baltimore Buck.

He met his fate ghastly pale, in obvious terror, but without whining or crying for mercy : he knew that he had no hope—no right to hope. And so he was swung aloft, and after struggling in agony for some minutes or so, he died with all his sins upon his head.

The look-out in the crow's nest saw this terrible scene from his secure porch, and called down into the deck-house—

“ They're hanging Balty !”

Several saw the tragedy enacted, and a shuddering whisper went round—

“ They've hanged Balty.”

And there the body hung—with blackened face, protruded tongue, and features horribly distorted. It was a terrible sight, and struck a chill of terror to the hearts of every one of those murdering villains. Remarked one in a low voice to Dick Smith—

“ They seem to carry it with a pretty high hand, them chaps aft. They don't seem much frightened. Who'd ha' thought they'd have hanged him ?”

“ It's all that second mate,” snarled Smith, savagely. “ If we could only have killed him, or kept him when we'd got him, we should have broke the back of their defence.”

“ D'ye think they'd let us have poor Balty's body ?” said Boston Bill.

“ Sure I don't know,” growled Smith. “ Don't see it's any good ; he's dead enough now—been swinging this ten minutes.”

“ Aye, but he wor my pertickler pal—reg'lar chums, we was ; and I promised, and he promised, that if anything happened to either on-us, the other would see him buried



decent and respectable. D'ye think they'd give up the body?"

Now Dick Smith could not afford, in the present state of affairs, to offend or do anything further to cast down the spirits of his men, least of all Boston Bill, who had a very strong party at his back.

"Can't say, I'm sure, mate," he replied; "but I'll call a parley by and bye, and ask. Let's have some rum all round, and some of that wine we got down in the tunnel, just to 'liven us up."

This proposal was a very unusual one for the ringleader, who generally did all he could to restrain them from drinking, fearful of their getting drunk, unruly, and falling an easy prey to the enemy. It showed that the capture of his lieutenant had produced a deep effect upon him.

Of course there was no objection to the rum, and after about a quart of it—all they had—and a gallon of the wine had been drunk, the mutineers recovered, in a measure, from their state of depression and collapse.

"You see, mates, it's luck that's done it all—luck's been dead against us. Yet all the same, we've hekl our own, and now it's time for luck to turn."

"We shan't have no luck," said Bill, gloomily, "so long as my poor chum swings there by the neck. Go out and ask for him, Smith, or else we'll be cursed right on through."

"All right, mate," replied Smith. "I'll do it now."

Our friend Simon the Sailor was not a little surprised when Smith made his appearance on deck, and demanded a parley.

"Well, what have you got to say?" he replied.

"Only this. Will you give up the body of our mate as you've hanged?"

"I'll have him lowered down, sewn up in sail-cloth, and committed to the deep. I suppose that will be sufficient."

"No, no!" muttered Bill from the deck-house. "That won't do. I must have the corpse and see he's buried decent. Tell him that, Dick."

"Well, you see," said the ringleader, thus prompted, "that won't 'xactly do, Mr. Second Mate. We want his body, we do, so as to give it Christian burial—read the reg'lar ser-

vice—'ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul,' and etcetera."

The latter part of the ruffian's attempted quotation was ominously like the last words of a judge passing sentence on a condemned criminal.

This, however, Mr. Richard Smith did not notice, nor would he have cared, probably, if he had. For a moment or two the second mate made no reply.

"You infernal, hypocritical, murderous villain!" he said, presently; "*you* talk of Christian burial, and reading the burial service, in part composed of Holy Writ! It's enough to make one's blood run cold."

"Never mind that," replied Smith, with one of his most hideous grins, "will you give us the corpse?"

"Yes, you shall have the body of the executed felon," said Royston, after a few moments' thought; "but I should expect if you or any of your associate hell-hounds dare to read holy words, that you will choke in the act."

"All right, we'll chance that. Maybe you'll be wanting that service read over you afore many hours are over."

Deigning no answer, Royston called the steward, and then, with his aid, proceeded to lower the corpse. It happened, however, that as the feet of the body reached the deck, a roll of the vessel's stern, as she rose to a wave, caused the corpse to swing abaft the mizenmast.

At the same moment the steward let the rope slip from his hands, and Royston, feeble as he was, was unable to sustain the weight thus suddenly brought upon him. The body fell right across the canvas shelter which Helen Vandaleur had contrived for herself abaft the mast, in order to avoid the horrors of the cabin.

The next moment she started up, and ran shrieking away. Seeing the second mate, however, standing looking on calmly, well satisfied, as she thought, with the slack of the rope in his hands, she hurried forward, and with flashing eyes, clenched hands, and deadly pale face, confronted him.

"You villain! you wretch! You contrived this horror, this outrage, out of mean spite! Coward that you are!"

Then she rushed down into the cabin, excited, trembling, half hysterical, from the sudden and awful fright,

## CHAPTER XLIV.

## ▲ SHOT FROM THE CROW'S NEST.

HELEN VANDALEUR, when the corpse fell on her, had just awakened from a feverish, unquiet sleep. She saw it swing towards her, but could not move in time. When she got aft, to her excited fancy Simon the Sailor seemed to be looking on with a grim smile of satisfaction, as if enjoying his ghastly joke or revenge, whichever it might be.

She did not doubt for one instant that it had been done purposely. He stood with the rope in his hand, with a malicious smile on his face, as she could have sworn. But, in fact, such was far from the case. She felt suddenly faint from weakness, and perhaps, also, from the sight of the distorted and blackened features of the dead man; and hence the strange expression of face, the half-parted lips showing the teeth, which caused her to think he was smiling and enjoying his triumph.

When down in the dark and dismal cabin, she crept into one of the after-state rooms, and, crouching on a locker, gave vent to her excitement in hysterical tears. After a bit she began to bethink her of what had happened—of the words she had used to Simon—and a suspicion shortly arose in her mind that she might possibly have been mistaken.

After all he had done and suffered, it certainly seemed very unlikely that he should so act. And then she had called him villain, wretch, and coward! The last he certainly was not, or she would not at this moment have been alive.

She thought of his weak and wounded state, brought about in his successful efforts to save her from the bloodthirsty, cruel mutineers, and her heart smote her. She dried her eyes, tried to look calm and composed, and came out into the cabin.

There was no person there save the two sentries at the fore part. The wounded had been moved into the smaller cabins on either side, and the unhappy lady passengers, and three of the male passengers, had sought shelter and rest in

the various berths. The cook was asleep, and the sailors and steward were on deck. So she seated herself at the foot of the companion-stairs, resolved to wait there till Simon came down, and then speak to him; and if, as she now began to think, she had been mistaken, to sacrifice her pride, and ask his pardon.

Simon, on hearing the words of Helen, felt cut to the heart; and, as was but natural, bitterly offended and indignant.

"Coward!" he muttered, gazing earnestly after her, when she had disappeared; "if I were a coward and worse, it is not *you* who should taunt me with it, Miss Helen Vandaleur."

Sadly and slowly he then proceeded to wrap up the dead body in some old sail cloths, and then he and the steward, and two of the sailors, dragged it towards the break of the poop, and lowered it down into the water.

"Now, then, you fellows, forward there. Two of you come aft—only two, mind—and take the body of your executed accomplice."

"All right," replied a gruff voice from the deck-house, and Boston Bill and Death's Head Dick came aft, and proceeded to drag the corpse forward.

"It will be your turn next, Mr. Smith," said Royston. "No fear of your being drowned. That skeleton neck of yours is meant for the hangman's rope."

"Don't you holler till you're out of the wood, Mr. Mate. Mayhap it's yourself will have to walk the plank next."

After this little interchange of civilities, Simon the Sailor immediately went below, intending to see and speak to Helen Vandaleur. He found her at the foot of the companion-stairs awaiting him. She rose hastily, and was about to speak eagerly, passionately, but he interrupted her quickly, harshly.

"Silence! not a word! It is for me to speak—you to listen."

"One moment—" she began, but he again stopped her sternly.

"Miss Helen St. Cymon Vandaleur, you used just now harsh and insulting words to me. You called me wretch,

villain, and coward. I will tell you this much. You are a false-hearted, ungrateful traitress—unworthy of the name of woman! an infamous liar! and, for my part, I never wish to speak more to you, or even to hold any communication with you again as long as my life lasts.”

With that he turned and went on deck again, leaving her speechless with shame and humiliation.

“Perhaps it is best as it is,” she said between her clenched teeth and bloodless lips—“best as it is. I may have been mistaken—probably was mistaken; but after what has now passed, we must be strangers for ever! I was willing to make atonement—apology; but now all is over, and we are strangers. I hate him! I hate him!”

Possibly she did hate him as she said, but at all events she was intensely miserable.

Royston, fuming and furious, despite his weakness and sore head, went on deck, and his attention was drawn by the steward away from the topic uppermost in his thoughts.

“I say, sir, what about the land on the lee bow? I don’t see it, and yet we have been running down towards it more than an hour.”

The spy-glass hung on a belaying-pin at the mizenmast; and, taking it down, Simon went to the lee mizen-rigging, and took a long, steady look for the land, which certainly was not visible to the naked eye. Nothing but the clear outline of the horizon could he discover.

“I can’t make this out,” he said, as a third time he carefully scanned the horizon; “it seems as though it had sunk into the sea.”

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, than the report of a rifle, and the whistle of a bullet, were heard simultaneously, and the glass spun from his hand, and was smashed close to the eye-piece, within an inch of his head.

The face of Dick Smith was seen for a moment at the top of the crow’s-nest, eagerly watching the effect of his shot.

Simon the Sailor staggered back, startled by so narrow an escape, and a hideous grin appeared on the villain’s face, thinking he had hit his man.

“Not this time, Mr. Smith!” cried Royston. “It will

be my turn next, remember that. I won't miss you, believe me, when the time comes."

With these taunting words of defiance, he hastened to seek shelter. Two of the sailors, Ezra Tanner and the steward, were crouching by the companion-way, sheltered from fire by the barricade.

"I can't make out about this land," said Simon; "it certainly was to be seen an hour ago."

"Cape Flyaway, a sure sign of heavy weather, that's just what it was," remarked the oldest of the sailors.

"Cape Flyaway!" echoed the others.

"Aye," said Simon, "it must have been Cape Flyaway."

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE CABIN PARTY HOLD A COUNCIL.

THAT the supposed land was in reality nothing but that deceptive appearance known by sailors as Cape Flyaway, there could be no doubt. This illusion, caused by a particular arrangement of clouds of a certain description, under certain favourable conditions of light and other things, is somewhat so perfect as to deceive an old and wary seaman.

The clouds assume the exact semblance of rough mountainous land—peaks, bluffs, and range over range, while the dark shadows of the valleys can at all times be plainly seen, not misty or cloud-like, but with clearly-cut, bold outline. The appearance seldom lasts long, and vanishes by the clouds—rising or sinking below the horizon according to which way the wind comes.

Strange to say, although it would seem that the neighbourhood of land, where there would probably be harbours and ships, offered a chance of safety to the defenders of the ship and gold, Simon Royston experienced a feeling of relief when he discovered that it was really Cape Flyaway.

The fact was, that he was glad the time for the final desperate struggle might be postponed. For he knew right well,

as indeed everybody must who thought about it, that the mutineers would make the most determined effort to overcome their resistance, and carry the cabin by storm, rather than that they should communicate either with the shore or another vessel. And in his present state of lassitude and weakness from loss of blood, fatigue and pain, he really did not feel either inclined or able for another hand-to-hand conflict.

It is true that the mutineers were not in a much better plight, and even more discouraged and dispirited than their adversaries (for the hanging of their comrade had produced a most depressing effect on them); but then in case of assistance being at hand, they would be nerved by the desperation of despair. And so it was with a sigh of relief—a feeling of deep care and anxiety removed—that the brave young officer found that there was no land, no sail in sight, and that, at all events, the final struggle would be postponed for another day.

He felt pretty well assured that the mutineers had received such a severe handling, and were so dispirited by the execution of their chief man, next to Smith, that they could never be brought to attack again that night, under any circumstances short of life or death. Besides, if they did, it would only be a half-hearted affair, and the barricades and defensive arrangements were now so strong and perfect that he had little doubt of repulsing them easily.

Moreover, he had got his little party into a very tolerable state of discipline. Every man knew his post, and was by this time accustomed to the smell of powder, the use of arms, and the sight of blood. Even to the ladies he had assigned stations and specific duties, which they could perform as well as men, thus freeing some of the latter for more active service.

There was a general feeling among the defenders of the cabin, that such a heavy blow and discouragement had been inflicted on the mutineers, so as to keep them quiet for some little time. Indeed, their mad rushes having all failed with signal slaughter to themselves, two prisoners having been deliberately rescued from them; and their last and **more cunning plan of burrowing beneath the deck having**

been defeated, with the capture and execution of their second in command, it was evident they must mature some other scheme, and that was not to be done at a moment's notice.

So, with feelings of thankfulness for the prospect of rest, Simon, and such of his companions as were not on sentry-duty, gathered round the mizenmast, sheltered by that and the barricade from the chance of an enemy's bullet, and commenced to hold a discussion.

"It's just a fortnight since this fearful mutiny broke out," remarked Ezra Tanner.

"And oh! what a fortnight—a fortnight of agony and terror! No; a year, ten years of horror it seems I have passed," said one of the passengers not remarkable for fortitude of spirits.

"It is useless talking of the past," said Royston, with sound, common sense. "Let's turn our thoughts to the future."

"Don't you think it would be as well to give them the gold, or at any rate part of it, and let them take the biggest boat, with provisions, and go where they please? Perhaps they'd accept the offer, if it were made."

"It will never be made or assented to by me," said Simon, firmly. "They are a treacherous lot of devils, headed, I believe, by the arch-fiend himself, and would only deceive us, and cut all our throats in the long run, if we were to do anything of the kind. Our only chance is to show a bold front and fight it out. What say you, Ezra?"

"Same as you," replied the horse-breaker.

"You see we're getting weaker every day; the wounded getting worse; the women falling ill; and even we men losing strength and heart."

"I don't lose heart," said Ezra, "and I know Mr. Royston don't. We'll beat 'em yet."

"What this gentleman says about us getting weaker may be true," said the second mate. "We've lost captain, mate, carpenter, and some other of our best men; but then they've suffered far worse. They have been repulsed—beaten in every encounter, while we have been uniformly victorious. They have far more reason than we have to feel discouraged. Before long I expect some of them will turn faint-hearted,



and perhaps part of them may come over to us. At all events, we've had the best of it hitherto, that's a certainty ; so let us look to the future, and see how we can keep our vantage ground."

This was finally assented to, even by the faint-hearted passenger. The steward now brought up coffee, with preserved milk, rum, and cabin biscuits, and butter—a most welcome meal.

"Talk about our not having the best of it," said Simon, who was deeply anxious to keep up the spirits of his companions, "why, do you suppose they'll get such a meal as this to cheer 'em up after the fatigues and dangers of the day? Not a bit of it; nothing but hard junk, black biscuits, and water—that's what they've got to keep themselves up to fighting point on."

The hot coffee, with rum, &c., had quite an inspiring effect, and as the sun sank beneath a heavy bank of clouds on the western horizon, all were cheerful and confident.

"Mister Royston," said Walsh, the oldest sailor on board, "you talked about looking for'ard to the future."

"I did, my man."

"Well, I've been a doin' of it, and what do you think I see ahead?"

"What?"

"Look at the sky; look at the falling glass and wind; look at that bank o' clouds that's been getting bigger and bigger into south'ard all day, till now; it's like a lot o' close-packed lead-coloured wool. What I see in the future is a most tremendous blow, and a harder one than any we've had yet—nothing more nor less than a hurricane—like one o' them typhoons as sweeps the China seas."

"If you're right," muttered Simon, almost involuntarily, "may the Lord have mercy on us! We could scarcely hope, in this state, to weather a cyclone."

"There's heavy weather coming to a sartinty," remarked Jones, another sailor.

"Let's hope it's only an ordinary gale," said Simon, encouragingly, who had been examining the barometer and the threatening sky.

"Aye, let's hope for the best," said Walsh, in his deep,

## A PLOT ARRANGED.

gruff voice ; “ but let’s get ready for the worst—a hurricane ; —cyclone they calls ’em—a reg’lar snorter !”

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### A PLOT ARRANGED.

THE old sailor was right, as Simon had feared from the first. It was not often that cyclones or circular storms visited those latitudes, but there was every indication that one of these terrible hurricanes was sweeping down on them.

By the middle of the next afternoon it blew a hard gale from the south-west, and each hour it was obvious that the fury of both wind and sea increased. As night closed in on the scene, the howling and shrieking of the wind, and the roar of the angry waves, were enough to appal even the stoutest heart. At times there would come a treacherous lull, after which the gale would burst on the devoted ship with renewed fury.

Simon, well aware of the gravity of the situation, and the imminent peril of the vessel, had called a parley with the ringleader of the mutineers, and proposed that they should heave her to under close-reefed topsails and storm-staysail.

He explained that, in his opinion, by scudding before the wind they were running right into one of those terrible cyclones which are sometimes hundreds of miles across, and have two motions—one onward, the other circular—just as the earth sweeps round the sun, causing the yearly changes, and also which revolves on her axis, causing the alternations of day and night. He felt almost certain that if the centre of the cyclone passed over them the ship must evidently be lost.

Death’s Head Dick was no fool, and saw the force of this fully ; so it was settled that the mutineers should reef the fore and maintopsails, and make all snug forward, while the cabin party did the same aft. By arrangement, the main and mizen-topsails were to be reefed together, so that the

whole of both parties should be aloft together. Royston and one man at the wheel, and Smith with one man forward to let go the ropes, &c., were to remain on deck ; thus each were to be a check upon the other.

It was also agreed that neither party should leave the yard, even though one had finished reefing first, until the other also had done, and all were to descend simultaneously. Simon took, as he thought, every possible precaution against even the attempt of treachery.

It must have been Satan himself who whispered into the ear of Death's Head Dick a most crafty, cruel, and murderous scheme. His eyes gleamed, and his cadaverous cheek flushed, as he pondered on this devil's plan.

"I have it—I have it," he muttered. "Oh! if that cursed second mate would only go up on the yard! I'll try it on."

All was now in readiness. There was at this time a comparative lull, though it still blew hard. The vessel was brought up to the wind until it was nearly a-beam, in order that when the proper time came the yards might be laid square for reefing.

It was considered by Simon that the fore-topsail and fore-topmast staysail, would effectually prevent her broaching to. In his seamanship he was quite right, but he little guessed what was about to happen—what a fiendish plot Death's Head Dick and the devil had between them concocted, and meant to carry out, if possible.

The chief mutineer called to him Boston Bill, and thus spoke to him—

"Now, Bill, you do exactly what I tell you, and the day's our own. The ship will be ours before another sun rises. Don't ask questions, but this time just do as I tell you. There's no danger to yourself whatever. I'll take all the risk."

Bill readily consented.

"Well, as soon as you get up aloft, go on above the top-sail yard, and cut the mizen top-gallant and royal stays; then come down to the maintop and cut the mizen topmast-stay. I'll do the rest. Is your knife sharp?"

"Yes, my knife's like a razor," said Bill, staring stupidly; "but look here, if I cut the stays, and if so be she should

be took aback, why, the mizen-topmast would be over the side."

Death's Head Dick grinned an ominous, ghastly grin.

"Never you mind, Bill. You just do as I tell you, unless you'd rather attack the barricade cabin again, and lead the men yourself."

"All right, boss, I'll do as you say."

"Now, look here. Listen to me, and mind you understand. You are to cut royal and topgallant-stays as soon as you can; but as to the mizen topmast-stay, you mustn't cut that right through till you hear the signal."

"What's the signal?"

"Just wait a bit and I'll tell you. When you come down from cutting the royal and topgallant-stays, don't go on the yard to reef with the rest, but get into the top; lie down flat on your belly; look out so that that cursed second mate don't see you, and run away at the topmast-stay till its about half through; and then with another good cut you can finish the job. When you hear the signal—"

"And what's the signal?"

"The thrashing of the foretopsail in the wind. I shall let go the weather-sheet and the foretopmast-staysail-sheet at the same time."

"Jerusalem! The sails will thrash themselves all to pieces in this gale."

"Never you mind. That's my look out. Anyhow will you do it? I ain't time to drive my meaning into your thick head now."

"Yes, I'll do it."

"And you're sure you understand?"

"Sartin."

"Don't cut the topmast-stay till you hear the foretopsail thrashing in the wind, then blaze away. The maintopsail will be about reefed by that time, and you can all come down on deck as fast as you can."

"But 'spose they ain't done reefin' the topsail? I thought we wasn't to come down, none of us, till both topsails was reefed."

"Never you mind about the topsail," replied Death's Head Dick, with another hideous grin. "If it ain't reefed

by the time you hear the foretopsail kicking up fine deligh', it'll reef itself."

Boston Bill, whose head was none of the brightest, was completely in a fog, and had not the least idea what Dick Smith was driving at.

"All right, Dick. I'll do it 'zactly as you say."

"Right you are. Now I'll go and tell that second dickey as we're all ready."

Then Death's Head Dick went on deck, walked boldly aft, and hailed the cabin—

"Cabin ahoy! Mr. Royston, we're all ready."

Simon came out on to the front of the poop.

"Very well," he said, cautiously. "You are more numerous than we are. Let some of your men go aloft first."

"All right," replied the ringleader, readily, somewhat to Royston's surprise. "You can go aloft yourself, Mr. Royston, if you like, as I know you ain't got many seamen aft, and those lubbers of passengers without someone to look after them."

Strange to say, Simon was going to propose this very thing, and at first was inclined to jump at the offer. But the *Mister* Royston staggered him, and made him suspicious. Dick was a great deal too civil, he thought.

"No, I think I'd better stop below, and look after the steering, and the braces," he said, coldly.

Dick ground his teeth with rage, but replied as carelessly as he could—

"All right; just as you like. We'd better be quick—the gale's freshening up again, and we shall have it down worse than ever, shortly."

Death's Head Dick went forward, and Simon, having called his men up in readiness, proceeded to fasten blue lights all along the break of the poop.

"What are you doing there, Mr. Royston?" shouted the mutineer. "No tricks, you know."

"I'm only sticking blue lights ready for firing," answered Simon, coolly. "It's getting dusk fast, and may be quite dark before we've done reefing, and I mean to have plenty of light till this job's over."

Dick ground his teeth, and cursed again silently.

"Never mind," he said, "that won't stop me. It'll be too late before he lights them fireworks."

As Royston had requested, Death's Head Dick sent some of his men aloft first.

"All ready forward?" cried Royston, who was to conduct the operation, as a matter of course, having command of the helm.

"All ready."

"Square the main and mizen-yards. Well so—let go the topsail-halliards."

Then down came the yards on to the caps, the reef tackles were hauled out, and the men went aloft to reef the sails.

Simon was alone on the poop with the man at the wheel, while Death's Head Dick had solitary possession of all the fore part of the deck. A strange feeling of misgiving, which grew moment by moment on the young officer, possessed him. He had a terrible foreboding of coming disaster—of some treachery intended—he knew not, could not guess what. Minute by minute passed. The reefing went on satisfactorily.

"Haul out to leeward!" he heard shouted from the weather maintopsail yard. This told him that they were far ahead of his own party on the mizen-topsail-yard.

Another two or three minutes, and he saw that the maintopsail was all but reefed. Just at that moment the gale freshened up. An instant afterwards he heard the rattle of chains, and the loud roaring, threshing of canvas in the wind. He saw the vessel's head come swooping up to windward, and knew that something had happened to her sails forward—thought that the foretopsail sheet had parted.

"Hard up the helm!" he shouted.

But the man, weak from loss of blood—for he had been wounded—was unable to do so alone, and Royston ran aft and assisted him to heave it hard up. Then he ran forward to the break of the poop, and saw Death's Head Dick striking away vigorously at some object or other. At the same time the vessel flew up in the wind, despite the helm. He had just time to fire a blue light when there was a sudden, sharp, cracking report.

Death's Head Dick looked aloft for a moment ; then with a yell of triumph he ran forward.

The next moment there was a terrible crash—a roaring, rushing sound, and the screams of men in mortal fear of agony—loud above the hoarse roar of the storm.

Royston looked, and his heart stood still.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### ROYSTON'S RESOLVE AWES THE MUTINEERS.

It was now all but dark, and but for the sudden flaring up of the bright blue light Royston had lighted, he could not have seen, in all its details, the terrible catastrophe.

Well might he stand aghast and, for a time, stupefied with horror and dismay. Looking up when he heard the first sharp report, he beheld the mizenmast and part of the mizenmast sway slowly aft and to leeward. With quick perception, he saw that the stays, which supported them forward, hung loose. The sail, half reefed, was flat aback, and a furious squall was tearing over the sea.

"The stays have parted," was his first thought ; but quick as lightning came another—"That hell-hound has cut the stays ! He was chopping at the mizenmast with an axe when I ran forward."

All this passed through his mind, not as I am compelled to write it, but instantaneously, even as the mast tottered, and before it fell.

Then came the roar and rush of the spars through the air, the last scream of the unfortunates before they were plunged into the raging sea, and the crash and splintering of the wood, as some of the spars struck the deck and the side of the ship.

The mast broke off about twelve feet above the deck, and the whole of the top hamper went bodily over into the sea to leeward, carrying with it every unwounded man of the cabin party then on deck. For the man at the wheel had been wounded, and the man left at the cannon down below

—the last terrible alternative to surrendering—was also wounded.

Royston at once grasped the full magnitude of the disaster. In such a gale, with such a sea, he knew right well that there was no hope for those who had gone over with the mast. They were as good as dead men. Ezra Tanner, with his stout heart and tremendous strength ; steward, cook, sailors, and the unfortunate passengers—all gone to their doom, at scarce a moment's notice !

The fall of the mast also brought down with it the main-top-gallant-mast, so that the crash and noise were something awful. Royston suddenly awakened to a sense of the fact that the mutineers were descending the main rigging. Instantly a fierce determination possessed him.

"Let it be so," he said. "My last hour has come. We will all die together. They shall never have the ship and the gold !"

Then quickly, but without excitement or hurry, he fired another blue light, and walked slowly aft to the top of the companion-way leading to the cabin.

After the loss of the mast the vessel quickly payed off from the wind, and was soon scudding before the gale, her speed greatly hindered, however, by the wreck of the spars which held by the rigging, clung to her, and as, tossed by the now tumultuous sea, she tore ahead, beat and thumped against her sides and bottom in such a way as to threaten staving her in.

Arrived aft the top of the companion, Simon looked down. He saw the wounded man whom he had placed in charge of the cannon was at his post, though unable to stand ; he was obliged to seat himself on a case. The women passengers, who knew that some dire disaster had happened, but not the whole truth, were huddled together, weeping, moaning, and lamenting. He saw Helen Vandaleur seated, pale but quiet, at the foot of the companion-stairs. Then he turned his face forward, and hailed—

"Forward there ! You, Richard Smith, where are you ?"

"Here !" replied that worthy. "What is it—her second mate going to give the ship up, eh ? Found out it's no good fighting, eh ?"



"Come aft you and some of your men, as many as you like. You needn't be afraid. You can come up armed. I want to have a talk with you, and explain matters."

Death's Head Dick deliberated and consulted for some time. He could not help suspecting some deep design on the part of the second mate, and when he finally resolved to go, he took seven men with him, all armed to the teeth.

He encountered no opposition when he mounted the poop—saw no one, save the man at the wheel, who was leaning over the barrel apparently from pain or weakness. Next he proceeded to go down into the cabin.

"Come down, Dick Smith, come down. There's only myself and one or two wounded men. Surely you are not afraid?"

"Look out for treachery, lads," said Dick; "keep close to me. Have your knives and pistols ready."

Then, cautiously, and pistol in hand, and almost expecting a sudden attack, the mutineer leader descended, followed by his gang. Above the lazaretto-hatch there hung a lantern, and by its light he saw Simon Royston standing up beside the brass cannon.

"Keep forward, Dick Smith! Don't dare to approach me, or I'll pull the trigger-string of this piece instantly, and blow a hole in the ship."

Dick drew back. The words and the manner of the young officer were those of a man thoroughly determined and prepared for the worst.

"I sent for you, Smith," he said, "just to remind you that you cannot have it all your own way—that you must do as I tell you."

"The deuce I must!" growled Smith.

"Aye, that you must, or else this hour is your last. Now, look around you—what do you see? A few frightened cowering women—a barricaded stronghold, with no one to defend it but myself—weak and wounded—and these same unhappy ladies—for we can take no account of the more desperately wounded, whose groans you can, perhaps, hear. Well, you see all this, and doubtless you say to yourself, 'this day is ours—the end has come.' You are wrong altogether; wrong in so far as your gaining the victory over us

is concerned. This little string I hold in my hand shall be the means of your discomfiture. One slight jerk, and the cannon you see with its muzzle pointed down the store-room, is fired. It is heavily loaded with powder and round shot, and the instant after I have discharged it, the sea will rush in through a yawning chasm in the ship's quarter, which not all the carpenters in Portsmouth dockyard could stop before she foundered, a matter of about five minutes. Now I have made up my mind to adopt this last desperate resource. I know right well that there is no hope of mercy from you—you mean murder, wholesale murder. I choose, however, that you and your associate scoundrels shall all perish with us. I am heartily sick and weary with this prolonged struggle. Wounded, and in pain as I am, with but little hope to cheer me up, I may well look upon death as a welcome friend, and in dying I shall have the stern satisfaction of knowing that I have defeated your designs on the gold, and that you and your gang must perish with us. The difference is, that I don't fear death, and you do. I see it in your cowardly white face."

"Look here. Can't we come to no terms—no arrangement?" said Boston Bill, for Death's Head Dick seemed in deep thought, evidently sorely troubled in his mind.

"No terms with such murderous wretches as you! no terms, except giving up your arms, and submitting your selves."

Death's Head Dick consulted for a moment or two with some of his gang.

"He'll do it," he said, as his opinion; "I can see it in his eye."

"Is it a dead certainty as the cannon will blow a hole in her too big to stop?"

"Dead certain. It will knock a hole in her a shark could swim in by."

"Now then, Mr. Richard Smith, I order you and your gang to go on deck. I advise you to clear away the wreck. You hear how some of the spars are thumping against her sides and bottom. Go on deck; clear away the wreck, and then go forward, every man of you. Night and day I, or some one I can trust as well, will be at this cannon. At the

slightest alarm, off she goes. I've half a mind to settle the matter now, once and forever."

His gleaming eyes and pale, determined face, as he stood thus with the trigger-string in his hand, struck terror to the mutineers. They saw before them a determined man, with power in his hands to destroy them all.

"On deck with you," said Simon Royston, "and do as I tell you. I will count ten. If you are not all out of the cabin by that time, so help me heaven I will fire the piece! One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—"

Before he reached ten, the cabin was clear, the mutineers making a scrambling rush up the companion-stairs.

"Once more I have gained a victory, but alas! only a temporary one," said Royston to himself. "This cannot last forever; human nature cannot stand the strain on mind and body."

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### HELEN VANDALEUR'S HEROISM.

ALTHOUGH the mutineers were so far discomfited in being compelled to obey the orders of the second mate of the Thunder, and leave the cabin, the situation of the little party of survivors was well-nigh desperate. Simon looked around the cabin with feelings akin to despair.

The swinging oil-lamp, which gave all the light there was in the dismal den, cast its rays on a most depressing scene. One wounded man—he who had been left in charge of the cannon, and whom Royston had relieved—was seated on an empty case, leaning against the bulk-head. His deadly pallor, and the spasmodic twitching of his features, as every now and then a sharp spasm of pain shot through his frame, told that he was in a bad way.

Royston's heart sank within him, as, after a brief examination of the poor fellow's wound, the state of his pulse, and other signs, he knew that he was fast approaching his end. Still, the brave fellow struggled bravely to hold up.

"I can keep sentry over the cannon, sir," he said; "and never fear but that when you give the word I'll fire. The order would come almost like a relief. My hours are numbered, I know; and only that I'd like to do all I can for you and the women folk, I'd pray for death to come now."

Simon rigged up a sort of seat close to the lazaretto-hatch, so that the wounded man could rest in a reclining position, still keeping hold of the string with which to fire the cannon when the time came.

Then he turned his attention to the wounded in the cabin forward. Two were delirious, one insensible, and for all there was no hope. The women had crowded into the after-cabin, and the sound of their sobs and stifled lamentations, mingled with the occasional cries of the wounded and their delirious mutterings, contributed to render the cabin of the Thunder especially dismal and terrible.

Helen Vandaleur alone seemed to keep up her heart, the other females having sunk into a state of despairing apathy. She had witnessed the interview between Royston and the mutineers, heard the young officer solemnly declare that he would sink the ship ere they should gain their end, and she thoroughly believed that he would keep his word. Strange to say, it made her feel calmer, happier.

"At least I can depend upon one thing. I shall not fall alive into the hands of those demons."

These were her thoughts, as she watched with feelings of respect, even admiration, the proceedings of Simon Royston. After doing all he could to soothe the pain of the wounded, and calm the terror of the women, he prepared to go on deck. She was sitting by the companion-way at the time, the spot furthest removed from the wounded and the hideous scent of blood, as also the disheartening, dismal wailings of the women in the after-cabin.

She moved to let him pass, and he acknowledged the act by a cold bow, not speaking a single word, and then passed on deck, first assuring himself that the sentinel over the cannon was at his post and awake.

On deck fresh troubles, fresh disasters, met him. The man at the wheel, before slightly wounded, had been struck on the chest by a block, when the mast went by the board. He

was wounded before, and this threatened to disable him entirely. Royston examined him, felt almost certain that a rib was broken, and by the blood and froth which came to his mouth, that the lungs were injured.

"Do you think you can keep up for an hour or two, Johnson?" asked Royston; "if not I must take the wheel, and you go below."

"I'll stick to my post as long as I can turn a spoke of the wheel, sir. Both my arms are unhurt, though there's a terrible bruise on my chest, and damage inside, besides the bullet wound in the thigh."

"That's right, my brave lad. With the help of Providence we may pull through yet. Take a drop out of this flask, it will do you good. Keep her before the wind, nothing else can be done at present. It's impossible to heave her to with the mizenmast gone, even if those villains would turn to and obey orders."

Meanwhile Death's Head Dick, well aware that the safety of the ship depended on the wreck being cleared away, and all made snug to meet the fast increasing gale, went to work with his gang, and by the liberal use of knives and axes, the Thunder was in ten minutes free from the broken fragments of the masts and yards, which had gone by the board.

The vessel was now scudding under close-reefed fore and maintopsails, and for the present no more could be done. All saw the necessity of weathering the storm before making fresh attempts, or taking any measures against the few weak, wounded, and weary men aft.

Royston got lanterns hung on the breastwork at the break of the poop, also two at the mizenmast. He did not take particular care to keep in shelter, as he had informed Dick Smith that if he should be shot it was unanimously decided aft that there being no further hope for them in this world, they were to fire the cannon, which would blow a hole in the ship, and consign her to the bottom.

And so night passed on; wind and sea howling and raging, vieing with each other in fury, the vessel tearing through the foam like a mad thing, at the rate of some twelve knots an hour.

It was an anxious time for Simon Royston. Despite the

terrible weariness which oppressed him, he felt bound to keep awake, at all events, till daylight, when he hoped that the gale would moderate—hoped, and yet scarcely expected it, for the mercury continued sinking, and all the signs of the sky bespoke still worse weather to come.

Every hour or so he went below into the cabin, to see that the wounded man was at his post. Though he kept up bravely, and declared he would keep his watch till daylight, his condition alarmed Simon greatly, and he guessed that before long another would be added to the list of the dead.

Shortly after midnight it came on to rain in torrents, which had the effect of beating down the sea, and was, so far, advantageous. At four bells in the middle watch he went below, and found the sentinel at the cannon awake, but very feeble—evidently fast failing.

“I shall last till daylight—last to see another sun rise, then good-bye to this world. I’m plenty strong enough to pull the string; and, do you know, sir, I feel a kind of a longing for you to give the word.”

The poor fellow was seated on the deck, reclining against a case covered with canvas, which made a sort of couch for him. Simon marked his weak, hurried breathing, and husky voice—quite altered from its natural tone—and knew that the end was not very far off.

Helen Vandaleur, driven from her former place on deck by the fall of the mast and the now drenching rain, crouched at the foot of the companion-stairs.

When Royston went up again on deck she was fast asleep; and, pausing a moment or two, he gazed on her pale, haggard, but still beautiful features, with mingled emotions of pity, tenderness, and anger.

“She is a brave girl at all events,” he said to himself. “Strange that one so high-spirited, so lovely, and to all appearance so loveable, should be the mercenary vixen she is! Yes, vixen,” he muttered to himself, “that is the right word; for, had Katharine, in the ‘Taming of the Shrew,’ been such an arrogant, proud, false-hearted girl as this, Petruchio would never have undertaken his task. Vixen! A wild she-cat!”

Hard words, hard thoughts ; and yet, in view of what had passed, not without excuse.

At eight bells in the middle watch (4 A.M.), he again came down into the cabin. To his great surprise, Helen Vandaleur was awake, and rested on a case, close to the cannon. She pointed to the figure of the wounded man, the head and shoulders now covered by a flag.

"Poor fellow ! He has gone off to sleep, utterly worn out," he said. "I suppose—"

"I will take his post," she said. "Instantly on hearing the order, I will fire the cannon. Woman though I am, I do not feel much afraid. Take the flag from his face."

Royston did so almost mechanically, a strange feeling of awe coming over him. The next moment he gazed down at the stony features and glassy eye of a corpse ! Another of their little party had gone to his last account.

Helen Vandaleur had seen him die, and with sad courage had resolved to take his post, sure of her own resolution and strength.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE MUTINEERS RECRUIT THEIR STRENGTH.

"You had better take some rest," said Helen ; "at least for an hour or two. I will call you at daylight. Should any attempt be made by our enemies, you will be awakened by the roar of the cannon ; for, rest assured, I will fire it. Lie down and sleep, this is no time for petty quarrels. Our only hope of safety depends on you now. Rest, and rely on me to keep a vigilant look out."

"You are right," he said, as he covered up the face of the corpse. "I will sleep, if possible, though if it be only for an hour."

There was no approach in warmth or cordiality in the few words which passed between these two, who, in olden times, had loved each other well. The memory of what had so recently occurred—haughty pride on one part, and wrong, insult, and injury on the other—kept them apart.

He lay down on the deck, close to the companion-way, and with a roll of old sail for a pillow, soon went off into a deep sleep.

Helen remained at her self-appointed post—pale, calm, and almost as motionless as a statue. Ever and anon she would turn her face towards the sleeping officer, and each time a look of pitying tenderness and admiration would come on her features.

"I wronged him, I know I did. But *he* insulted, scorned, and repulsed me; and that last, though he had saved my life ten times over, I could never forgive. Ah, me! I almost long for the signal to fire the cannon, and end this weary, horrible struggle!"

Meanwhile, as black despair was thus settling down on the defenders of the cabin, perplexity reigned among the mutineers. The desperate step Royston had taken, and the opinion they had all formed as to the determination of his character, had a numbing, paralysing effect. They did not know what to be up to. It was quite certain that the second mate had the power to sink the ship in five minutes. And it was nearly as certain that he would do so, if they made any attack or attempt whatever. Death's Head Dick could suggest no plan for immediate action.

"We must wait, lads, till this gale is over, anyhow. That cursed second mate can't hold out forever; it ain't in human nature. He's weak, wounded, and dog-tired. He must give in afore long. You see he dursn't go to sleep. And, besides him, there's only two more men, both wounded, and likely to get worse. Then as for the women, they're worse than useless—they're in the way."

Death's Head Dick was right in the main, though he had no idea that one of the ladies aft was as willing and able to fire the cannon as Royston himself, and would assuredly do so when occasion required it.

He was right in deciding that their best chance was to lay quiet, watch every chance, and trust to the fortune or the utter exhaustion of the few remaining defenders of the ship.

"How would it be to shoot him?" suggested one. "I've seen him show out by the lantern light two or three times."

Dick Smith thought a bit, and then shook his head.



"Depend upon it, he's left some one at the cannon as will fire it off instanter if he's shot. You see the worst of it is, they're so tired out, sick, sore, and weary, that they'd almost as soon as not put an end to their misery right off. That's our danger."

So it was decided that they should wait, and see what happened after the gale was over. Dick Smith thought that possibly then they might come to terms. The women might influence Royston, and he, seeing that things were worse, might offer to give up the ship and the gold, on the condition of their lives being spared.

Not that the villain really meant for a moment to spare their lives, though he would promise to do so. He was not aware that the second mate knew so much of his plans as he really did, and thought it likely that he would at last be disposed to come to terms.

Meanwhile, though the storm raged furiously, and the ship began to roll and labour heavily, the mutineers were able to recruit their strength—safe against any attack from aft.

The vessel was kept scudding before the wind, steering they knew not whither, though Dick had an idea that they were making to the north-east. And so the vessel toiled on through the tumultuous sea—a wide expanse of dark threatening waves, with angry, foaming crests. The gale increased in fury all day, until towards sundown. It blew so furiously as almost to press the ship's bows under water.

The wind now began to shift to the west and north-west, and, as it was impossible to do anything more than keep her easily before it, her course was now almost east. This, if continued long enough, must bring her to the coast of South America.

Meanwhile, things grew every hour more desperate aft. The wounded man, who had taken the wheel, had become so much worse, that Royston felt bound to send him below, for he had no longer strength to turn the spokes. The young officer thought that by lashing the helm a few turns a-port, the vessel, though yawing wildly several points each way, would yet keep running before the wind. This fortunate discovery released him from the necessity of himself taking the wheel.

Another night closed in on the dismal scene ; and the gale showing no signs of abating, the huge seas now roared and thundered up astern, threatening to break on board and sweep her decks.

The wounded man, when he had retired from the wheel, was able, after some hours' rest, to take the place of Helen Vandaleur, who now began to feel the efforts of exhaustion, consequent on the excitement and terrible fatigue she had undergone.

Of the mutineers next to nothing was to be seen ; they had got grog, wine, and provisions, and seemed determined to keep to the weather of the deck-house, leaving the vessel to take her chance until the storm was over. The rolling and tossing of the vessel were now so violent as to render it all but impossible to keep footing on her decks.

Royston took the precaution to lash the cannon firmly to two ring-bolts near the small hatch : and then, after making sure that all was safe below, and that no further attempts were being made by the way of the tunnel through the hold, he came on deck to take a survey of the state of affairs, ere another night closed in on the scene.

What he saw was by no means encouraging ; an angry leaden sky, an expanse of black-looking sea, with mountainous rollers tipped with foam, ceaselessly rushing down on them from the wind's eye. The dark colour of the sea was caused by the reflection of the sullen blue sky, and in neither could he see any cause for hope that the gale was nearly over.

" If I had but a crew," he muttered, " I would heave her to—the sea begins to run so high as to put her in danger of being pooped. But it is impossible. She must take her chance."

That night he kept the deck, remaining near the binnacle, so as to watch the changes in her course as the wind shifted, in order that he might be able to make a rough, dead-reckoning calculation as to her position on the morrow.

Helen Vandaleur and the wounded sailor, who seemed to have revived a little after his rest and shelter from the storm, kept watch over the cannon, while he remained the whole night on deck, alone. About daybreak the wind

suddenly shifted due north, and greatly abated in violence—until, in about an hour after this change, it was nearly calm. There being now not enough wind to steady her, she rolled in a most frightful manner, her yard-arms on either side often dipping in the water.

“If this lasts she’ll roll the masts out of her,” Royston said to himself.

But presently a tremendous fall of rain came on—the water descending in a continuous sheet. This, as is always the case, beat down the sea, and, though a great swell, and big, lazy rollers tossed and tumbled the vessel about, there was no rushing “white horse”—great green seas, with foaming tops—threatening to overwhelm her.

What little wind there was came from the north, but the swell was from the southward; and, from the look of the sky and the state of the mercury in the barometer, it seemed likely that another furious blow was coming from the southward.

When the young officer went below, shortly after sunrise, to snatch a little repose, of which he stood sorely in need, he was surrounded by the frightened female passengers, who hitherto had not in the slightest degree interfered or sought to influence his course. Now, however, urged by fear and despair, they nearly deafened him with their clamour.

The burden of their cry was—

“Give up the ship, make terms with the mutineers, on condition that our lives shall be spared!”

He smiled sadly, and shook his head.

“I will think of it,” he said. “See if I can devise any plan by which our lives may be saved, even at the expense of the ship and the gold.”

But the more he thought, the more hopeless it seemed. One plan occurred to him. This was to propose that the mutineers should take the longboat, provisions, water, and a portion of the gold, and leave them in possession of the ship.

But then it occurred to him that they would never consent to this, never leave a sea-worthy vessel, well stocked with stores, and all things needful, for an open boat, at a great distance from land, and without knowing to a certainty where they were.

"No," he said to himself, "it is impracticable. There is little or no hope; and I see but one resource—fire the cannon and scuttle the ship!"

After a brief rest of a couple of hours, he again went on deck, and there a sight awaited him which gave him fresh hope.

Land was in sight—this time beyond all mistake or doubt.

## CHAPTER L.

### ROYSTON AND THE MUTINEERS MAKE TERMS.

WHEN first he went on deck, and looked around on the dark rolling waters, the horizon to the eastward and north-east was obscured by heavy torrents of rain. But as the rain-clouds poured out and emptied themselves of their contents, the obscurity they caused gradually vanished, and the young officer's quick eye soon espied, bearing down east, what he at first considered to be a dense black cloud.

But as the rain-mist cleared away, and the clouds rose higher, he soon became aware that it was land he beheld—high, mountainous, rugged land, stretching from east north-east to south-east.

It appeared to be only some fifteen or twenty miles distant, and there could be no possible mistake about it, as he could make out the white line of breakers along the shore.

What land could it be? According to the rough, dead reckoning he had kept, they were yet far from the coast of South America. It seemed likely that the vessel had been drifted by currents to other regions than where he supposed she was. At all events, there was the land. Now could he make it serve their purpose?

While he was pondering on this, Death's Head Dick, who had also discovered it, came out from the deck-house, and hailed—

"Second mate, ahoy! I want to talk to you."

## THE MUTINY OF THE THUNDER.

"Come aft to the quarter-deck, and I will meet you there."

First taking the precaution to see that one or other of the two—the wounded man and Helen—were ready to fire the cannon, Royston descended to the quarter-deck. Helen had promised that if there was any attack or attempt at treachery she would pull the trigger-string and fire the piece of ordnance. And he knew he could depend on her keeping her word.

So it was without the least fear that he met the mutineeringleader himself unarmed, and careless as to whether the latter was or not. He had as thoroughly made up his mind that the power he possessed of sinking the ship at even five minutes' notice, was the most potent one he could have, and that the conviction on the part of the villains that he would not fear to use it, was his greatest safeguard.

And, in real truth, so harassed and wearied out was he by the long succession of fatigues, disasters, and horrors they had experienced, that it would require no sacrifice for him to take the irrevocable step which would so quickly consign ship and all on board to the bosom of the deep.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, unconcernedly.

"Why, we're in sight of land."

"I know it. What of that?"

"Well, I thought you might have some proposal to make—some offer to come to terms."

"I've no proposal whatever to make, except that you give up your arms and submit."

"That ain't likely, and you know it."

"Well, then, have you anything to say?"

"Why, I was thinking that perhaps you and the women-folk might take the longboat, put some grub and water in her, and make for the land. We'd let you go, and good riddance."

"That'll never do, Dick Smith!" said Royston, decidedly. "Is that all you have to say?"

"Well, yes. If you ain't inclined to listen to no terms at all, things must take their course. We must win in the long run, for you and the one or two wounded men you've got can't last out forever—'tain't in human natur'."

"We'll last too long for you, you'll find," replied the other, boldly; "and when we can't last any longer, why I'll just blow a hole in her, that's all, my fine fellow."

Death's Head Dick was evidently ill at ease. The bold, defiant demeanour of the other disconcerted him, and he began seriously to fear that the enterprise would end in sinking the vessel, and the death of all of them by drowning.

"Well, now, suppose that we are willing to take part of the gold—First of all, though," he said, suddenly interrupting himself, "what land is that?"

"Some part of the coast of South America," replied Royston, promptly, who instantly divined what was passing in his mind.

Death's Head Dick hesitated some time before speaking again. What he had to say was evidently of momentous importance, and he knew it would seem as though he feared the result, which indeed was the fact.

"Well, then, look here. Suppose that we were willing to take the longboat, and one of the quarter-boats with provisions and water, would you give us up the gold? That's what we've been fighting for, and that's what we mean to have. We'll leave you the ship to do the best you could with her, on a solemn oath that you would not make for any port within a thousand miles of this, so as to give us time to get clear of."

"How could we work the ship, short-handed as we are?" asked Royston.

"There's six men as wouldn't join us; there was more, but some of 'em got cantankerous, and tried to break out, so we had to knock 'em on the head, and chuck 'em overboard."

"And what of your wounded? You must leave a good many."

"We'll take with us all that are likely to recover, and those that are so bad as are likely to die, why we'll leave on board."

Now Royston was fearful of some afterthought—some treacherous design behindhand, by which their destruction might be accomplished. However, their state was so desperate, that he resolved to consider the matter, and consult

with his companions in misfortune. Accordingly, he left Death's Head Dick, promising to return and give him an answer in ten minutes.

The women passengers were too frightened and unnerved for them to clearly understand what the proposal of the mutineers was, beyond the bare fact that they offered to go away in the boat. Nor could they be brought to see the danger of treachery; for they were all feverishly eager that he should take their offer, and give up all the gold, on the promise of their leaving the ship for good.

Helen Vandaleur, however, at once voted in favour of making some sort of terms with the mutineers.

"Whatever happens," said she, "we cannot be in much worse plight. Perhaps they will take part of the gold, and it may be possible to guard against treachery."

Ultimately, Royston returned to the quarter-deck with a definite proposal.

"Now, look here. There is, as you know, gold on board to the value of about half a million sterling—about five tons in weight. I will give up to you gold to the value of a hundred thousand pounds—about one ton in weight. With that you can go where you like—do what you can."

"No—'tain't enough. Tell you what I'll do. I'll take two ton—that's about as much as the longboat will take comfortably."

Simon thought it over.

"It's more than she can safely carry."

"Well, that's our look-out."

The young officer reflected again. Had he any right to give up two-fifths of the treasure of the Thunder? Had he any right to give up any?

But a little consideration told him that in such desperate straits, and after having made such a prolonged fight of it, he was fully justified in making the best terms he could.

Finally, it was agreed that Death's Head Dick and the mutineers should take the longboat and one of the other boats, and a ton and a half of gold, as much water and provisions as were necessary, and take their departure from the ship, Simon taking a solemn oath not to steer her for any port within a thousand miles of where they then were.

These broad terms being agreed on, the second mate of the Thunder proceeded to take the best and safest arrangements possible for carrying out this affair, without giving a chance of treachery or foul play to their enemies.

## CHAPTER LI.

### THE MUTINEERS PREPARE TO DEPART.

THERE were many preliminaries to be arranged as to the getting up the gold, hoisting the boat, and so forth. For the task of bringing the gold from the place where it was stowed in the after-hold, Simon permitted two of the mutineers to come aft, he himself directing them to the spot where it was stowed.

There was little or no trouble in getting at the treasure through the store-room, all that had to be done being merely moving a few sacks and casks. Nor was there any danger of a sudden attack, for he kept well on his guard, and especially saw that their all-powerful weapon, the cannon, was ready to be discharged at a moment's notice.

The gold was in leather bags, containing each about twelve ounces, and these bags or pouches were securely packed in parcels of ten, in strong, hardwood boxes bound with iron.

As the mutineers were to have a ton and a half of gold it took some little time to get it from the hold, but it was eventually accomplished, and the boxes piled one on the other in the cabin. Royston now dismissed the two men, telling them to go forward and help their companions to get the longboat out.

The wind had now lulled till it was almost calm, and though there was a heavy swell running there was not too much sea for a boat to live. Royston told Death's Head Dick to throw a quantity of sails into the longboat.

The mutineer asked for what purpose.

"For this. I shall have the longboat passed under the stern, and the gold and provisions dropped into her, not a man being suffered to embark in her till all is ready. Unless



there is something at the bottom of the boat to break the fall, those heavy iron-bound boxes will stave her planks in. When all the gold and provisions are in the longboat, I shall cut her adrift. Then you and four companions can take the starboard cutter, embark in her, and run out to your treasure-galley, and make what arrangements you can. Meanwhile, if there is any wind, I and those you leave behind shall make sail, and leave you to your own fate, whatever that may be. So you observe, Richard Smith, I'm determined to have all fair and square and above board. You can't get the treasure till you have finally left the ship, and I will take care you play no tricks."

Dick could not help acknowledging that the second mate had devised a most skilful plan to get rid of them beyond reach, without giving them a chance to attempt any treachery. The plan of setting the treasure adrift, and making them go out to get it in another boat, was a master-stroke. For, even if they should wish to return to the ship, it would be a matter of the greatest difficulty, if not altogether impossible; for from under shelter on board the vessel, a deadly fire might be poured into the exposed boat, should she attempt to come alongside again.

Indeed, Smith did not feel quite easy in his mind as to what course the young officer might adopt. He would, doubtless, instantly liberate the men imprisoned forward, and, putting loaded rifles in their hands, he might fire on the boat, and even, if there was any wind, run her down.

But for two reasons he finally decided that the second mate of the Thunder would not act thus. In the first place, though himself a treacherous scoundrel, he had an inward feeling that Simon the Sailor would keep his word. And, in the second place, he calculated he would be only too glad, after all the perils, fatigues, and disasters they had suffered in the defence of their cabin, to let the mutineers depart with a portion of the spoil.

This was not the end of the affair that the mutineer had intended. He had meant to have the whole of the gold, whereas, now, under any circumstances, they must lose a portion of it. But, though he fully well knew that things could not possibly fall out as he had hoped and intended,

yet he had contrived that the second mate, and those left with him on board the Thunder, should not attain their object—safety to themselves, the ship, and the rest of the gold.

He had matured, and had ready for carrying out, a crafty, and, of course, treacherous plan, whereby ship, and all on board, should perish.

He would have liked to have kept possession of the ship and the treasure, but that being impossible, he decided to content himself with a scheme of wholesale murder. So perfect was his plan that he felt certain it must succeed, and that the young officer and his companions who had so long defied him were doomed to death! More, he would himself witness the catastrophe from a safe distance.

## CHAPTER LII.

### THE EXPLOSION.

AT the prospect of getting rid of their terrible enemies at once and forever, the spirits of the worn-out survivors of the cabin party rose. The ladies ceased their wailings and lamentations, and even so far regained their composure as to bethink themselves of their personal appearance. Some, who were but half dressed, hastily attired themselves in a more befitting manner; and, altogether, the aspect of affairs was changed.

On Helen Vandaleur, however, the prospect of immediate safety, of an end of all their troubles and terrors, had a contrary effect. So long as there was danger, and her services were absolutely necessary, her brave, intrepid spirit sustained her bodily powers. But now that the worst was over, she became mentally and physically limp, so to speak, like an instring bow.

That everything would be arranged satisfactorily, and that the mutineers would not attempt any treachery, but would carry out the bargain, she, in common with the others, fully believed. For, having witnessed the skill, intrepidity, and

determination of the young officer, they had now the fullest confidence in his ability to bring them safe through.

At last all the necessary arrangements were made. The longboat was passed astern, the gold dropped into it, Smith being himself permitted to handle every box of treasure and see it safe into the boat.

"Now, have you got everything that you want?" asked the young officer.

"Yes, I reckon so," was the reply of the chief mutineer.

"Then here goes."

And with the words he cast off the "painter" or rope by which the big boat was towed astern, and threw the end into the sea. There was not much wind, but the vessel was going about two knots, and the boat was soon left astern.

"Now, then, away you go, and send your men up one by one to get into the quarter-boat," said Royston.

This boat was now towed alongside the lee gangway, in readiness for the mutineers. One by one they came out of the deck-house, some carrying beds and bedding, and all armed. Royston counted sixteen men who were apparently not wounded, or, at all events, only slightly hurt. Then there were four who required assistance—pale and ghastly, with agony in their features—and one who had to be carried to the gangway and lowered down. Death's Head Dick was the last to enter the boat, and the instant he was out of the ship *Simon the Sailor* cast off the rope.

To all appearance they were now free of their terrible enemies—once for all, and for ever.

But Royston feared some devilish plot on the part of Dick Smith. He did not like his look, nor a sort of cunning twinkle in his eye.

All this while Miss Vandaleur was at the cannon. The young officer saw her powers were failing half an hour previously, and forced her to drink a tumbler of wine.

"Keep up, keep up for one hour more, and we are saved," he said to her. "Remember that all now depends on you and me."

"You and me!" The coupling of the two together caused

a strange feeling, a sort of thrill, to shoot through her frame. It seemed as though fate were obstinately bent on mingling up their two lives. Ambition, false pride, and her father's constant persuasion, had succeeded, she thought, in effacing his image from her heart. And, just when this had been done, she finds herself thrown into intimate companionship with him on board the same ship.

Despite all her attempts to hate him, and her successes in insulting him, her heart yearns towards him. She feels, she knows, that he has risked his life on board this doomed ship to help and save her. She cannot but see and admire his calm courage, his heroic determination, his skilful conduct, in a most desperate affair. And, then, he saves her from certain death—an infamous and cruel death—and is himself seriously wounded in so doing. And now he tells her—and she knows it is true—that all depends on her and him!

Pondering these things over, and exceedingly anxious in her heart (though she does not acknowledge it even to herself) to prove herself worthy of his confidence, she nerved herself to the utmost, and was able to combat and conquer the feeling of exhaustion and faintness which was coming over her.

The instant the second boat had been cast off, Royston ran down into the cabin.

"You must not give way yet—not yet!" he cried. "They have gone, but I fear some villainy of that scoundrel Smith. Keep up for only a few minutes more. I will hurry forward, and release the good men and true confined forward."

"Yes, yes—I am strong," she said, "quite strong. Thank God, they are gone! Yes, I will have more wine," she said, as he handed her a tumbler; "only be quick!"

Her voice belied her words that she was strong. It was feeble and gasping, and, though her eyes were bright, it was not the brightness of health.

He hastened away. Two minutes passed. Then she heard a dull roar, which swelled into a loud report. A terrible explosion had taken place!

She started to her feet—livid, pale, panting with excite-

ment and terror! And then she heard the voice of the wounded man, who had crawled up to the wheel at the top of the companion—

“It’s all over! They’ve blown up the ship for’ard, and Mr. Royston’s killed!”

Helen Vandaleur fainted.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### THE SHIP ON FIRE.

WHEN Miss Vandaleur recovered from her swoon, she was scarcely able to make out the true state of affairs; she felt dizzy—a stunned, sickening feeling oppressing her—the consciousness of some great and terrible calamity pervaded her, although such had been the shock to her already overwrought mind, that she was able to reveal to her memory what it was which had already occurred.

The cabin was filled with smoke, which came drifting in from forward, and rendered the obscurity greater than ever. Presently, however, she made out a figure kneeling on the locker at the starboard after-cabin part. But for her and this figure the cabins and saloon were untenanted, the women passengers and others having rushed on deck in terror when the explosion took place.

She gazed in wonder at the figure which she could only dimly make out through the smoke. Still, however, she was near enough, and her vision was so acute that she could recognise this kneeling figure, and see all its actions.

“The phantom of George Royston,” she said, half aloud, for she began to remember the circumstances of the explosion, and the voice from on deck which had conveyed the terrible information that the second mate was killed.

She watched the supposed ghost in silent horror; and, indeed, through the smoke the figure with blackened face, torn clothes, and gleaming eyes, looked more like a visitant from the world of spirits than a human being. She saw it take a long and deliberate aim out to sea, through the open

port, with a long-barrelled rifle he held. Then there followed the sharp crack of the fusil, and, suddenly starting to its feet, the figure gazed earnestly out, and cried triumphantly—

“Hit him, by heavens! The accursed scoundrel’s down, with my bullet in him.”

Then, without saying any more, the figure threw down the rifle, and hurried on deck, passing close to her, without taking any notice whatever of her. She shuddered and drew back, gazing in helpless terror, as the supposed ghost passed close to her.

It was not until he had passed her that she began to realise the fact that it was the second mate himself, alive, and tolerably vigorous, and no phantom that she had seen.

In a half-bewildered state, she went to the after-cabin window, and gazed out. There she saw, right astern, at a distance of nearly half a mile from the ship, the two boats—the longboat and the other one—the smaller boat having the other in tow.

Even without a glass she could make out that there was considerable confusion on board the cutter, and she began to comprehend that the second mate had escaped being killed by the explosion, and had hastened to avenge himself for the attempted treachery of Dick Smith by putting a bullet in him, if possible.

As these facts began to dawn upon her, she went slowly on deck, and soon perceived the true state of affairs. Smoke, and an occasional flicker of flame, came up the fore-hatchway, and also through a great jagged rent in the deck. Several of the crew, under the orders of the second mate—who certainly was very lively and energetic for a dead man—were busy drawing water in buckets, and throwing it down on the fire, which was being rapidly got under.

As she looked, she saw that no longer did tongues of flame shoot up, and that the smoke, instead of being black and dense, grew whiter—a certain sign that it was largely mixed with steam from the water thrown down, which, of course, showed that the fire was being fast subdued.

There could no longer be any thought of a ghost in her mind, for of course she knew that spirits did not personally pass buckets along, and help to put out fires.

"Thank heaven he is safe!" she cried, emphatically, "and that this last treachery has been defeated."

It happened in this way. When Royston went forward a sudden explosion occurred, blowing a large hole in the deck. He was instantaneously surrounded by fire and smoke, and hurled violently along the deck. Those who witnessed the blow-up, and saw him wrapped in flame, and hurled like a piece of splinter aft, thought that of a certainty he must have been killed.

But the singular good fortune which had enabled him hitherto to live through so many perils, and, though at great personal suffering, to defeat so many attempts, and triumph over such terrible disasters, did not even now desert him.

He was a good deal scorched, and for a moment or two stunned, but was soon able to stagger to his feet, and to discover that he was but little hurt, although very sore, and smarting from the heat of the gunpowder-blast, which had actually torn and burnt off portions of his dress.

His first thought was to get all hands to subdue the fire; and in a few minutes he found, to his great satisfaction, that this could be done, as it was confined to a few bales or packages only, and did not extend to the ship itself. Also he found out that no damage had been done to the hull of the vessel, her timbers and planks having proved strong enough to resist the explosion.

Had she been a small or weakly built vessel, a hole would, in all probability, have been blown in her side, and in a few minutes she must have foundered.

His next feeling was one of fury at the intended treachery of Death's Head Dick, which was by no means rendered less by the smarting caused by the fire and the aching of his bruises.

Hastening aft, he seized a long-barrelled rifle, the favourite weapon of poor Ezra Tanner, who perished with the fall of the mast. It was already loaded, and the after-cabin port commanded a view of the sea and the boats astern, which were within range could he aim with sufficient accuracy.

Three times he loaded and fired, missing each time. It was, perhaps, the reports of the rifle which aroused Helen Vandaleur from her swoon, for, as the reader knows, she

witnessed him fire the fourth shot. He got a good aim at the form of Death's Head Dick standing in the stern-sheets, just as the boat was raised on the summit of a wave, and to his great satisfaction saw the villain throw up his arms and fall forward.

He was too much excited and interested as to the fate of the ship to pay any attention to Helen Vandaleur, and indeed, as he hurried on deck, scarcely noticed her.

When he got forward again, he found that at first he had not comprehended the full extent of the mischief. On going down the hold, after the fire had been got under, an ominous sound fell upon his ears—the wash and rush of water! which was obviously pouring in at a rapid rate.

Had the explosion strained her, and caused her to spring a leak? If so, they were in a bad way, as it was almost certain that another, and perhaps even more terrible storm was impending, and might burst on them at any moment. He instantly started three of the best men with lanterns to search for the leak, while he himself also did his best to discover it.

He was rummaging about amidships, having made his way aft by the tunnel, which the mutineers had bored in the cargo, when he heard a voice hailing—

“Mr. Royston, ahoy!”

“Hallo!” he replied.

“I’ve found out what’s wrong.”

“What is it? Where’s the leak?”

“There’s no leak. The ship’s scuttled, and the water’s coming in like a sluice!”

This was indeed terrible news, and he hastened to make his way back towards the forehatch, from which direction the hail came.



## CHAPTER LIV.

## ▲ TIMELY DISCOVERY.

THE words of the sailor proved too true, and his discovery a disastrous fact. Dick Smith had taken the most cunning and, as he thought, complete measures to insure the destruction of the vessel.

In the first place he had, so to speak, dug up the cargo in the lower fore-hold, and made a sort of pit, down which he had gone, and with an auger bored half a dozen holes in the ship's side right through to the sea.

As he bored each hole, he plugged it up the instant the water spouted in, by means of long spikes of wood, which he could easily, and in a second or two, knock out again.

When all was in readiness for them to board the ship in the boat, he knocked out the plugs, and hastened to fill up the sort of pit he had made with boxes, barrels, cases, bales, and so on, jamming them down tightly. By this means he thought that the fact of the ship being scuttled would not be discovered, and, at all events, that those left on board would not be able to get at the auger-holes till too late.

Near the top of the filled-up pit he placed half a keg of powder, inserted a fusee, lighted it, and then covered up the hole so as to confine the exploding powder, and cause the blow-up to be as violent as possible.

It happened, however, that the explosion was both too powerful and not powerful enough. It had not strength enough to blow a hole in the side of the vessel, as he hoped it would, but power enough to play havoc with the cargo beneath and around the keg. It blew casks and cases to pieces, tore the fastenings off bales, set a good deal on fire, and, as it were, scooped out afresh the pit Death's Head Dick had so carefully made and filled up.

This scattering of the cargo nearly laid bare the very spot in the vessel's side where she had been scuttled. As it was, there was so little to cover the spouting jets of water, which were pouring in like torrents, that the rush and splash could

plainly be heard, and a sharp-headed and keen-sighted sailor soon found out the spot, and gave the alarm.

"Lanterns!" shouted Royston, as soon as he became aware of what was the mischief. "Get out the carpenter's tools. Joe Dawson make haste, and cut some spikes of different sizes, and we'll save her yet."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Joe Dawson, the seaman who had found out the mischief, as he clambered up on deck to make all haste with his task.

"Come down here, three or four of you, and help to clear away this cargo and rubbish. We'll be at the sore place in five minutes," said Royston.

His orders were promptly obeyed, and they went to work like men who knew their lives depended on it. In a very short space of time, boxes, cases, burning fragments, bales, and a quantity of dunnage and rubbish were dislodged, and passed up between decks, leaving a great cavity in the hold of the Thunder, into which the water spurted from the treacherous holes to a distance of several yards.

All hands were soon wet through from the spouting torrents, and so rapidly did the water rush in, that shortly after the holes were laid bare it began to make its appearance beneath their feet; and above the hissing splash of the stream, which poured constantly in, they could hear the sullen, ominous wash of a great body of water in the hold.

The instant a wooden spike was made and given to Royston, he took it, and, regardless of the furious jets of water, tried it in one of the holes. It was too small, so he instantly tore some woollen strips from his shirt, and bound them round it, so as to make it taper from the end. Then he took a mallet, and, not without some difficulty, hammered it in. Thus one hole, one cause of danger, and, if left alone, of certain destruction, was removed.

"Make all the rest tapering, and a little larger than this one. Bear a hand, lads. Out knives—anything."

It was an extraordinary scene to see these men working by lantern light in what might have seemed to be a subterranean fountain cave, or haunt of water sprites. Water splashed, spouted, and washed everywhere.

The second mate stood among the jets, which roared and

splashed about him, around him, all over him, till he was obliged to withdraw for a time, out of breath. And surely not one of the men who worked with all their energies in that watery den ever had such a shower-bath.

The vigorous measures adopted by the acting captain of the Thunder were not without effect. After exertions, rendered more exhausting by the torrents of water which it was impossible to escape as long as the auger-holes were unplugged, every one was at last securely stopped, and there remained only the water in the hold to be got rid of.

The vessel had not been pumped for a considerable time, and the water which had rushed in during this momentous half-hour, added to that which had accumulated, amounted to five feet in the hold. This was a dangerous quantity, as, until it was pumped or baled out, the vessel would labour far more, and not be nearly so buoyant.

The fire was soon extinguished, and the holes bored by Death's Head Dick securely stopped. It was now necessary to bale or pump out the ship. Before setting his scanty crew to work—now weary from confinement, bad air, and bad food—Royston mustered them all aft. He found that there were ten besides himself, six of whom were more or less hurt—two of whom at least were so badly wounded and generally ill as to be useless, while several others were not much better.

Besides these there were in the cabin eleven ladies and children, who, of course, were rather more of an encumbrance than an advantage.

George Royston fully appreciated the gravity of the situation—the ship half-water-logged, with so small a crew of exhausted men, and heavy weather impending. Nevertheless, he had the pumps rigged, but when he manned them and tried to start, he found that the strength of the little band was quite inadequate to keep them going. Clank—clank—clank! A few slow and laborious strokes, and then a full stop. There was no escape from it—no help for it; all hands were unable to work the pumps, that was a certainty.

He next resolved to neglect nothing: he rigged two light purchases, or "whips," over the main hatchway, and made haste to clear a well down in the hold, in order to bale by

buckets. This accomplished, he found that two unwounded men, and two of the least hurt, could keep a couple of buckets going. This would keep the water down, and even gain on it, though only very slowly. Taking the others, and getting assistance by calling those away who were baling when necessary, he proceeded to make the vessel as snug and prepared for heavy weather as it was possible.

It was by this time nearly calm, and she lay tossing and rolling in the heavy sea—her spars and timbers creaking and groaning dismally, as though ominous of coming disaster. She was going nearly dead before what little breeze there was, standing in a north westerly direction, away from the land and the two boats. She might have been moving at the rate of perhaps two knots an hour; but even at this pace they were fast dropping the two boats—the longboat with the gold on board and the other.

Royston went aft into the cabin, got the telescope, and took a good look at them. Again he had to pass Helen Vandaleur, and a little scream of terror escaped her as her eyes fell on his strange and terrible appearance.

Smoked and scorched by fire, bruised and blackened—his clothes torn, his hair and eyebrows and lashes singed—blood on his face and body—for the water and exertion had opened the wound on his head—he looked as wretched and frightful a looking figure as it is possible to conceive.

Helen Vandaleur scarcely knew him, such an extraordinary and pitiful appearance did he present; and when she heard his voice and recognised it, her heart bled for him.

"Excuse me," he said, with perfect self-possession, despite his fatigue, and the pain he must have suffered; "I am not exactly company for ladies in my present attire, I know; but we've had rather a rough time of it forward lately in making the ship safe."

"A rough time of it!" she cried, on the impulse of the moment, starting towards him with clasped hands. "Oh! you have behaved like a hero!"

He said nothing, but just a very faint smile came over his face—a smile which had a tinge of joy in it, but seemed almost painful in conjunction with his pale, bruised, smoked features. Then he passed on up the companion-way on deck,

"Inexorable!" she said, with a deep sigh, as she looked after him. "He will never forgive me—I shall never forgive myself. I wish it were all over, and I were dead!"

Worn out were her powers of endurance, and she sank exhausted to the deck, and lay there in a half-stupor, half-delirious sleep for some time.

## CHAPTER LV.

### UNPLEASANT REFLECTIONS.

A LOOK through the telescope at the boats revealed an unpleasant fact to the young officer—nothing else than that they were rowing towards the ship again, towing the long-boat after them.

This was a most serious discovery. It seemed as though they had discovered that Dick Smith's plan had been frustrated—that they had subdued the fire, and succeeded in stopping the auger-holes.

The first they could see for themselves, and smoke no longer poured from the hatchway; and as for the latter fact, if Dick Smith were alive, he knew enough as to the torrent of water which would pour in through the holes as to be certain that if not stopped the ship would be by this time setting down—on the very verge of foundering, if she had not already done so.

The young commander called to him Joe Dawson and the boatswain's mate, the two best and staunchest seamen on board, and giving them the glass to look for themselves, explained to them his opinion on the matter.

"I'm afraid they're rowing after us, seeing that their infamous treachery has failed, and mean to board us again if they can."

"It's a bad job," said Joe Dawson; "there ain't much wind, and they've got a sail up, I see."

"Yes," replied Royston, "and I've not put more canvas on her. I feel sure there's a terrible gale coming on. Yet,

if we make more sail, and the storm burst upon us, we should never be able to take it in again."

"You're right, sir," said Joe Dawson. "We dursn't make sail on her."

"I'll tell you what I propose, sir," said the boatswain's mate.

"Well, my lad, what is it?"

"Why, just to put our trust in Providence, get away if we can, and if not, fight it out."

"Aye," remarked Dawson; "if we keep ever so little wind, with the sea behind us, it will be hours before they can overhaul us."

"You're right, Dawson," said the young commander. "I should say four hours at the least."

"Then, sir," said Dawson, "let's leave one man at the wheel, and one in charge of the deck, and you and the others turn in; for the Lord knows, sir, you must want rest and a few hours' sleep bad enough."

"Aye, sir, that you must," urged the boatswain's mate. "I'm a bit hurt, and a good deal tired, but I ain't gone through a tenth part o' what you have."

The young officer was unwilling to yield his post even for a time, or consent to take some repose until the ship was out of danger. But they urged upon him that their salvation depended on his being vigorous in mind and body; for that it was through his skill, forethought, energy, and exertions, that they were now in as good a position as they were, and that if they did not renovate his failing powers by rest and sleep, they would be deprived of his services altogether, and left without the commander who had hitherto led them to victory, discomfited their enemies, and in whom they had implicit confidence.

So Royston, who saw the force of this reasoning, and who, in good sooth, could not possibly have stood further fatigue and anxiety without rest, yielded; and Joe Dawson, an excellent seaman, was appointed as temporary officer in command, he himself declaring that he was the strongest and least fatigued man on board.

Royston left orders that should the wind rise, or anything occur, and especially if the boats of the mutineers approached

within a mile, that he should be immediately called, in order to organise and lead the defence.

"They must never board this ship again," he said, firmly. "Better we sink her ourselves."

"Aye, sir, a dozen times," said the boatswain's mate; "and if it comes to the pinch, I'm the man to do it."

The word was passed for all but one man at the helm to turn in, and get what sleep was possible.

It need scarcely be said how welcome was this period of quiet repose, with no immediate danger—no terror of sudden alarm impending. As for the young officer, he merely changed his torn and wet attire for a dry shirt and trousers, and then lay down on the floor of the cabin, with a roll of sail cloth for a pillow.

He did not fall off to sleep at once, as is often the case when one is thoroughly exhausted, but lay with his eyes closed, strange visions and phantoms of the terrible scenes he had participated in passing through his brain. As he thus lay, and was just dozing off, he became conscious that something was being covered over him.

Just peering through his half-opened eyes, he beheld a female form standing by his side. He could see her face, on which the lamplight shone; it was haggard, pale, and wan-looking, but still he thought lovely, and that as much from the expression of ineffable sweetness and pity as from any beauty remaining.

It was Helen Vandaleur; and, after covering him carefully with a blanket and fur coat, she stood for a moment gazing down on him, evidently thinking him asleep, and then stole gently away.

## CHAPTER LVI.

### ON THE TRACK OF THE THUNDER.

It might have been thought that after having been so often discomfited, repulsed, and compelled to leave the ship while actually on board and in possession of the fore-part,

that the mutineers would never attempt anything so insane as to regain their position by force.

Such, however, seemed obviously their intention ; for what other reason could they have for rowing in pursuit, instead of making the best of their way to the land? The only hope they could have of taking her by the board was that the defenders of the ship were still greatly weakened and reduced in number.

This might have happened through the explosion, but they had no means of knowing it. It was certain that those in possession of the ship would fight with the utmost desperation to prevent their again getting a footing on her decks. And then, as a last resource, there was the means by which they had been prevented taking the cabin by storm when the defenders were reduced to two weak and wounded men only—the threat which would have been certainly carried out, of blowing a hole in the ship by means of the cannon.

This still remained to the men of the Thunder, and there was no reason to suppose that they would not avail themselves of it. Under all the circumstances, the movements of the mutineers were very mysterious.

George Royston slept soundly for nearly four hours, and was awakened by the boatswain's mate.

"The boat's coming up fast, sir. She isn't over a mile away now."

Royston was on his feet in an instant, and was about to hasten up on deck, when the boatswain's mate pointed to a swinging tray close to him, on which were coffee, biscuits, butter and wine.

"Better have something to eat, and a cup of coffee to wake you up, sir. It's all ready for you."

He had eaten nothing for a long time, and gladly adopted the suggestion.

"Ah, that was thoughtful of you," he said. "I can take a biscuit and butter, and a cup of coffee, with a great deal of satisfaction."

"Me, sir! I had nothing to do with it. I saw it on the swinging tray over your head, and thought of course it was for you. I expect some of the ladies had got it ready for you."



"Ah, just so," said Royston, musingly. "You're right, no doubt."

He could make an excellent guess as to whom he was indebted for this thoughtful and welcome provision. No one else than Helen Vandaleur, of course.

He drank a cup of coffee, in which he did not fail to detect the by no means unwholesome flavour of cognac, ate a couple of biscuits, and then, with more kindly feelings towards the young lady than he had experienced for a long time, went on deck.

He was greatly startled at the state of affairs. The sky presented a most ominous and threatening appearance, and although there was still little wind, there was every appearance of a terrific storm approaching.

Looking astern he saw the two boats, on both of which sails had been rigged. The cutter was rowed by six men, and by the aid of oars and sail they were coming up with the ship fast. The boatswain's mate handed him the telescope, and he took a look through it.

"By Jove!" he said, "I can see that rascal, Death's Head Dick, in the stern-sheets. He is propped up with bags for pillows, and covered with blankets. He's evidently wounded, but he is giving orders—he seems to me to be urging the men to row harder."

"You did hit him, then, captain, when you had your shots from the after-cabin window?" asked Dawson, who had heard of our friend's feat of marksmanship.

"Yes, I hit him, safe enough; but, unfortunately, did not send my bullet through his brain, the scoundrel!"

"What can their game be?" asked the boatswain's mate. "It don't seem to me likely that they mean to try boarding us."

Royston thought and puzzled over it, but in vain.

All hands had now flocked aft, and even the ladies were gazing over the stern with looks of terror at their dreaded enemies now approaching.

All waited to hear the opinion of the commander of the Thunder. There was but one solution of the mystery he could think of, and that an improbable one.

"It seems to me that they will never be so mad as to

attempt to board the ship, knowing that we are well armed. I can only surmise that they have, or fancy they have, some means of destroying her—of sinking her without themselves being on board to sink with her. And yet I don't see how they can hope to do that."

"What's that covered over with a tarpaulin under the bows of the cutter?" said one.

"It looks like a long barrel."

Almost at the same moment there was a considerable commotion on board the cutter. The men still continued rowing, but all the others, except two remained in the bows close to the black object covered over, and Death's Head Dick, who, lying wounded in the stern-sheets, was well enough to steer, got into the longboat.

This was an operation of some difficulty, and occupied several minutes, as there was a rolling sea. However, it was safely done, and then the seamen gave way with a will, and in a very short time the two boats of the mutineers were within a quarter of a mile of the ship. They were so close that the voice of Death's Head Dick could be heard giving orders.

"Blaze away, lads!"

Instantly after this order, the covering was thrown off the mysterious article in the bows, and a jet of flame and puff of smoke belched out. Almost instantly a small, round shot came bounding and ricocheting over the waves, but, fortunately, fell wide of the ship.

"By heavens! they've got artillery of some kind—cannon, if only popguns of things, big enough to knock a hole in the ship. How, in the name of all that's wonderful, did they get it?" exclaimed Royston. "They could not have had it on board, that's a certainty. In the first place, they would have used it against us; and in the second, they could not have got it into a boat without our seeing it."

The utmost consternation prevailed among the party on board the ship. The women began to moan, weep, and give vent to cries of despair, while even the sailors looked blankly in each other's faces, and the terrible word "artillery" was muttered again and again.

"Come, lads, cheer up!" cried Joe Dawson, who, next

to the young captain, was decidedly the most hopeful, determined, and energetic man on board. "If they've got a pop-gun you call artillery, we've got good rifles, and our captain here—good luck to his arm!—has hit one of them at near half a mile. Let's get out our shooting irons—blaze away at 'em, and never mind their artillery! What do you say, captain?"

But Royston's attention was engaged elsewhere.

The wind, such as there was, blew from the south-east, but looking due west, he saw that a terrible squall of wind and rain was rushing down on the ship. The sea was white with foam, and they could hear the dull roar of the storm, although it must have been quite two miles distant.

Just as Joe Dawson ceased speaking, the lightning flashed forth from the black clouds, and the thunder pealed out.

"Hard up with the helm!" cried Royston, as the first puff of the coming squall struck her. "Get her dead before the wind. Hoist the foretopmast staysail. Never mind their artillery. Heaven's artillery has opened, and we shall have enough to do to weather the storm, I'm thinking. As for those wretches in the open boats, may God have mercy on their souls. Their lives are not worth half an hour's purchase!"

## CHAPTER LVII.

### A STRANGE SAIL.

THAT which was so entirely unaccountable to the crew of the Thunder, need not remain so to the reader.

Death's Head Dick caused his men to cease rowing when a little over a quarter of a mile from the vessel, and lay to, expecting, with gloating pleasure, to witness the explosion and the foundering of the vessel.

The blow-up came off all right, and a yell of joy escaped him as he saw the flames and smoke shoot up in the air. Then he waited, anxiously expecting to see the ship settle down, preparatory to foundering.

Presently he was aware that some one was firing from the after-cabin window, and of course he knew that the boat—and probably he himself standing conspicuously in the stern—was the object aimed at. However, he laughed to scorn any idea of being hit at such long range.

The first three shots, as it happened, went high over his head, and he did not even hear the whistle of the bullets. This was caused by Royston on each occasion firing as the stern of the ship was rising on a wave, which had the effect of throwing the bullet high. But the fourth shot he fired just as the vessel's stern attained the summit of a wave, and just as the boat rose also.

The consequence was that the leaden messenger hissed through the air, and struck Dick full on the right side of the chest. He wore a thick pilot cloth jacket and waistcoat, which, together with the distance, prevented the bullet going right through him. However, it broke a rib, and glancing upward lodged in the shoulder, inflicting a most painful wound.

Death's Head Dick, after the wound had been bound up, and he had recovered from the first shot, resumed the command, declaring that he could give his orders while lying on an impromptu bed they had made for him.

No one objected, for he was obviously, and beyond all question, the fittest man to carry out to the end the desperate enterprise which had been undertaken mainly by his advice and instigation. Accordingly the boat was headed towards land, after laying-to for some time, to see if the Thunder would founder.

The weather was thick and hazy to the north-east, and several rain squalls quite shut out the view of the land.

"Sail, ho!" cried a man in the bow of the boat all at once.

Death's Head Dick, raising himself with difficulty on his elbow, looked out, and saw a schooner-rigged vessel standing to the northward. She was not more than a couple of miles from them, and did they wish it, with the present light wind, there would be no difficulty in crossing her bows, and speaking her.

The mutineer chief decided on so doing, and at once

altered the boat's course a little, and gave the word for the men to row with all their strength.

In about a quarter of an hour they were close alongside a small schooner, and as she evidently had but a small crew, Death's Head Dick hailed her, took the boat up alongside, and went on board with half a dozen men.

Now, strange to say, this schooner had assisted to save the crew of an American gunboat, which had gone ashore further down the coast. The heavy guns were lost, but two little carronades were saved from the wreck, together with a quantity of ammunition.

The captain of the schooner fancied these immensely; and when he landed the crew of the gunboat, her captain made him a present of them, with powder and shot to boot, and moreover told him how and where to make a claim for more substantial remuneration on the United States Government.

Death's Head Dick soon learned all this, and a bright idea struck him. This was to obtain possession of the little carronades, which could easily be carried, and fired on board the boats, he reckoned, make all haste back to the ship, and sink her by a shot or two between wind and water.

He soon contrived to gain his end, offering the skipper of the schooner a price too tempting for him to resist. He contrived to make excuses for their strange appearance in open boats, by saying, that being nearly calm they had put off from the big ship in the offing (pointing to the Thunder) for a row, and were going back at once.

In less than half an hour after boarding the schooner Osprey, of Nantucket, the mutineers were pulling half back in the direction of the Thunder.

Dick Smith, seeing that he had the means, as he thought, of sinking the ship and drowning all hands, impressed on them the urgent necessity, for the safety of their own necks, of not leaving one alive on board the Thunder to tell the tale.

"If they all go to the bottom," he urged, "we are safe. We can take our gold where we like; tell our own tale, and there will be no one to contradict us. If they get safe off, we dare not enter a port in safety, for they may get into

harbour before us, and then the news of what had happened would fly like wildfire from every port—from the North Pacific to the Atlantic coast and Europe. No, lads. If they perish, we are all safe and rich men; if they get away, we are outcasts on the face of the sea, and dare not show our faces anywhere. They must die. That ship must founder, and we must sink her."

"Aye, aye, the Thunder must be sunk."

"Dick's right."

"Down to the bottom with her. We must look to ourselves first."

These and other words were enough for the ringleader, and he hastened to give orders for mounting one of the little cannons in the bows of each boat, while others manned the oars, and the remainder made sail to catch as much wind as possible, and so increase the speed of the boats.

The reader knows the result, down to the firing of the first gun, and the coming down from the west of the furious squall which seemed to threaten all with destruction.

Death's Head Dick saw the danger when it was probably too late, and even he turned pale as he heard peal after peal of thunder, the roaring of wind and waves, and saw the storm-swept aspect of the sea. And he had to weather it in the deeply-laden open boats. He realised all the danger instantly.

"Rouse all hands, lads! There's a storm coming on that will sink the Thunder without our help, and ourselves, too, if we don't look out. Over with all dead weight. Overboard with the guns!"

## CHAPTER LVIII.

### THE STORM.

WITHIN five minutes after the storm had burst upon the Thunder, the two boats, and, indeed, everything above fifty yards distant from the ship, were hidden from view. Torrents of rain, mist, and the spray of the sea, driven aloft by

the force of the wind, all combined to wrap the whole surface of the sea in dim obscurity.

There was no longer any necessity to trouble about their enemies—the mutineers ; for those wretches would undoubtedly have the utmost difficulty in preserving their own lives, even if they could succeed in doing so, which George Royston did not believe possible.

Minute by minute the gale increased, and ere long, such was the fury of the storm, not a word could be heard, even at a short distance, if not shouted at the top of the voice. The shrieking of the wind, and the roar of the waves, made up a concert, which effectually drowned all other sounds, and, but for the speaking-trumpet, the commander of the Thunder could not have made his voice heard.

The vessel steered very wildly, and two men were necessary at the helm to heave the wheel up and down. As it was, she yawed many points on either side of her course, and at times Royston feared lest she should broach-to. To guard against this as much as possible, he got a tarpaulin in the fore-rigging on either side, so that even if the foretopmast-staysail, or close-reefed foretopsail should be blown away, there would still be a sufficient surface for the wind to act upon forward to keep her head from the wind.

The sea began to rise fast, and as the gale showed not the least indication of abating, but rather the contrary, affairs began to look very serious. The ship was too deep in the sea, having nearly five feet of water in her hold, and having lost a great part of her buoyancy, wallowed and rolled in a most dangerous way. Ere long she began to ship a good deal of water on each quarter, flooding the decks which were constantly wet, often a foot deep in water.

Under all the circumstances it is by no means strange that the young officer should look anxious and frequently consult the barometer, hoping for some indication of the gale moderating. But, alas ! the mercury gave him no consolation. Down—down—down—lower than he had ever seen it before, it fell.

The sky looked as black and threatening as it is possible to conceive—the lightning flashed, thunder roared, and night closed in on a dark and terrible scene. The vessel tore

madly along before the wind, yawing wildly to right and left chased by the great rollers, which, following her up astern broke in with a terrific roar on either quarter, deluging her decks with water.

She must have been going a good thirteen knots an hour, even under the scant canvas she had set. She was steering nearly nor'-west, the wind being about south-east; and at this rate she would soon put a great distance between herself and the land—*island or continent*—that had been sighted in the morning.

It is scarcely necessary to say that that night not a soul slept, or even lay down. The rolling and pitching of the ship grew more severe each hour, till it was almost impossible to make way along the deck without clinging to something for support. The crew were all on the fore part of the deck, sheltering themselves from the violence of the wind by getting under the lee of the deck-house, ready for any emergency.

Royston had impressed on them the necessity of being on deck and ready promptly to meet and remedy any disaster, and they had so much confidence in him, with a due sense of their perilous position, to obey him cheerfully.

As for the women passengers, they were huddled in the cabin once more, in a state of terror and despair, which they made painfully apparent by their cries and sobs.

Helen Vandaleur alone of all the ladies remained on deck. Wrapped in a cloak and shawl, she sat by the mizen-rigging, watching with feelings of mingled terror and admiration the grandeur and magnificence of the scene. Royston more than once urged her to go below.

"Miss Vandaleur, this is no place for you. The spray splashes over you, the rain beats on you, and the furious wind must pierce to your flesh," he shouted in her ear.

She shook her head as a token that she understood, but preferred remaining on deck. Well was it for herself that she did so.

It was not altogether admiration for the scene, or dislike for the dark cabin, with all its dismal accompaniments of weeping and moaning women, and screaming children, that prompted her to stay; but she had a sort of indefinite feeling



that she was safer on deck ; at least she fancied she had, and after events served to confirm her in the idea.

As for Royston, he got seriously alarmed ; and, as the storm showed signs of increasing in fury, he began to doubt the possibility of saving the ship. He knew full well that she could not roll and labour in the manner she did without leaking a great deal. Each moment she was taking in more water, sinking deeper in the sea, and becoming less and less buoyant. He could not but observe how much heavier her rolls, and especially her lee lurches, became, and how much slower she was in recovering from them.

She was evidently approaching a water-logged state ; and as it was impossible to work the pumps, and equally impossible to keep the water down by baling in such a gale, there was every probability that the huge seas—each hour increasing in size and fury—would soon make a clean broach over her.

It is true the hatches were battened down, and the casks were water-tight. Nevertheless, should the sea once get entire command of her, the crew would be forced to take to the rigging, and it would be impossible to pass along the decks for any purpose whatever.

Towards daylight the storm evidently increased in violence. The whole surface of the sea presented the appearance of a vast expanse of mountainous waves, with huge white tops of broken water, racing and tumbling after each other, soaring terribly, as they curled their crests aloft and broke. A quantity of foam, torn off the wave-tops by the wind, covered the whole, looking like a thin sheet of water or mist.

Finally, he had to call another man to the assistance of the two helmsmen, well aware of the danger of her broaching to, and the disastrous consequence thereof. Nor were his anticipations and forebodings unfounded ; for just at dawn of day a terrible disaster occurred, which alone was wanting to fill up the measure of their misfortunes.

He was standing, holding by the rigging, not far from Helen Vandaleur, when a shout from the helm caused him to turn and look. He could not hear the words, but soon saw what had happened. The tiller was flying to and fro

at random, without control, from starboard to port, port to starboard. The wheel-ropes had parted.

"All hands lay aft with relieving tackles!" he shouted through the speaking-trumpet. "The wheel-ropes have parted!"

The men instantly came out from their shelter, and hastened to get relieving tackle and ropes. But this could not be done in a moment, the ship rolling and labouring as she did. And, meanwhile, she came flying up to the wind, having no longer the rudder to prevent her.

"Ease off the port fore and foretops and braces, and haul in on the starboard!" he shouted, seeing that if the yards were not braced up to the wind, the sails would be put aback.

Then he stood and watched with great anxiety the fore-topmast staysail and the foretopsail. Would they hold? that was the momentous question.

As the ship came up to the wind she heeled over, and the force of the terrible storm was felt with much more severity.

"Thank heavens! the canvas holds," cried Royston, as he perceived that the head sails had stopped her coming up further to the wind.

In a few minutes, fresh wheel-ropes would have been rove, and the rudder being made now more efficient, she would have been got off before the wind again. But as the men were about to come aft, after having trimmed the yards, a sudden report, as of a cannon, was heard, followed by another, and then the loud flapping and thrashing of canvas.

Fore-topmast staysail and fore-topsail had both split almost at the same moment, and soon there remained nothing of the two sails, save a few fluttering rags and ribbons of canvas. This turned the scale, and the vessel came sweeping up to the wind. The young captain realised the disaster to its full extent, and knew what would follow.

"Climb up the mizen-rigging, as you value your life!" he shouted. "Clamber up anyhow; do not mind your dress, though it be blown off you. Climb up at least ten feet. It is a matter of life or death!"

Then he shouted at the top of his voice (he had unfortu-

nately dropped the speaking-trumpet, and it had rolled away to leeward)—

“All hands in the rigging! All hands aloft!”

Then he himself hastily climbed up the rigging a dozen ratlines, half dragging Helen Vandaleur with him.

The next moment the ship came up, port bow to the wind. Royston saw an enormous green sea coming down full on her bow, as she swept up toward it.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### FATE OF THE CREW.

ROYSTON was not a whit too soon taking to the rigging. Fortunate was it also for Helen Vandaleur that he happened to be near her, and was able both to shout to her to climb up, and also to help her down.

Scarcely had he safely gained the rigging when the vessel's head came sweeping up to the wind. He saw a tremendous green sea come roaring down full on her port-bow, which was also coming up to meet it. He foresaw that it must come on board her, and sweep her decks, and shouted at the top of his voice for the men to take to the rigging. But unfortunately the men did not hear him, and moreover did not so thoroughly appreciate the danger as he did.

The sea struck her—a tremendous staggering blow—full on the bow, and she trembled from stem to stern, as though she had run butt up against a rock. Then the men knew their danger, and endeavoured to gain the rigging. But the shock of the sea striking her caused her to heel over violently, so as to throw each one off his feet who had not hold of some rope or support, and thus not a man was able to gain the shrouds in time. In a moment they were swept off by the immense waves.

The young officer, clinging to the rigging, gazed on the scene with wonder, awe, and horror. When the sea struck her the foam and spray flew as high as the foretopmast-head, enveloping all the fore part of the ship as with a veil. Then

he saw the whole of her bows and forecastle, as it were, under water ; a huge green sea tumbling right on board, many feet above the highest part of the forecastle deck.

Bowsprit, jibboom, anchors, were all submerged beneath the huge sea, and it seemed really as though she was going to plunge down bows first. The sea came rushing aft like a great cataract, filling the waist, the water absolutely above the bulwarks.

Royston gave a cry of despair and grief as he saw the unfortunate sailors caught up and overwhelmed like so many straws by this terrible sea. On it came rushing, struck the fore part of the cabin, burst it in, and then rushed on to the poop, although this was raised fully six feet above the level of the quarter-deck.

The young commander heard the crash of wood-work as the cabin bulk-head was burst in ; then the rush of water, as the roaring wave careered onward.

Next came one piercing shriek—the death-cry of the unhappy ladies—and the next moment he knew, by a loud report, and the prolonged rush of water, that the great wave had burst right through the cabin, dashed to pieces the after-cabin windows, and carrying with it every living and moveable thing it had come across, had poured out into the sea, after making a clean sweep of the decks fore and aft.

George Royston knew the extent of the disaster, and groaned in the agony of his heart. But there was yet more misfortune to come.

Turning to the wheel, he was just in time to see that torn from its fastenings as though it were paper and secured with packthread, and washed bodily, men and all, over the stern into the raging sea. And while the water from this sea was still washing the decks, rushing out through scuppers, port-holes, and after-cabin windows (or rather a great gap in her stern, where the windows had been) she shipped another sea over the bows not much less than the first one.

This completed the havoc made by the first wave, and in half a minute the decks were swept absolutely clean ; every cask and objects securely fastened down having been torn from their lashings and swept away out through the stern.

For several hours the young officer and Helen Vandeleur

clung to the rigging, not daring to come down on the poop ; for ever and anon the seas broke on board and swept the decks, rushing up on the poop almost as violently as the first one.

Helen did not know the full extent of the catastrophe ; but Royston was well aware that he and she were the only living beings on board the Thunder. All the rest had perished.

All at once, without any warning, on a squall more furious than usual striking her, the maintopsail split, and in a few seconds nothing remained of it but a few fluttering rags. This had the effect of causing her to pay off from the wind, the pressure of so much canvas aft having been removed.

She was now scudding before the wind under bare poles, and perceiving that though the seas rushed in where the after-cabin windows had been, and the cabin-deck, quarter-deck, and waist, right forward to the forecastle, were constantly flooded in water, yet the poop was now no longer swept by the waves. So he assisted Helen Vandaleur to descend, and came down himself.

It was now about noon, and the violence of the wind seemed to abate. The sea, too, was evidently not so tumultuous, and as the mercury in the barometer began slowly to rise, there was hope that the storm had blown itself out.

The ship was still scudding before the wind, for the wheel being smashed there were no means whatever of steering her, and she went her own course. As fortune would have it, however, it seemed that she was fast running into smooth water and fair weather. Indeed, it almost seemed as though the storm had only prevailed on a certain limited expanse of ocean, for, by five hours after noon there was no sea at all to speak of ; and though the wind still blew a brisk gale, she went along before it steadily enough at the rate of three or four knots under bare poles only.

By six o'clock it was obvious that the gale had blown itself out. The decks were now dry, and Royston thought it time to seek some refreshment, and also to repair the damage to the after part of the ship, if possible, and rig some kind of steering gear.

## CHAPTER LX.

## THE LONELY OCCUPANTS OF THE THUNDER.

**THE** aspect of what had been the cuddy, or cabin saloon, of the Thunder, was dismal enough now. True, it was no longer the dark, dismal, barricaded den, fetid with the scent of blood, echoing with the wailing of women and children, the moans of wounded men, as it had been a few days previously.

Now it was light enough, and the rushing seas, which held possession of it for so many hours, had washed away all stains and traces of blood, and the planks were now clean, with no odour save the faint damp smell of salt water.

The side-cabin bulk-heads were all destroyed, burst away by the first rush of the sea, as were the bulk-heads of the after-cabins, and now the place was little more than an empty shed, with a roof and sides, but no ends. The solitude and bareness, however, seemed more depressing and melancholy than all the darkness, the groans of the wounded, cries of the women, the reports of the rifles, and the well-remembered smell of powder-smoke, to Helen Vandaleur.

While George Royston employed himself in taking off the hatch of the lazaretto, she leaned up against a fragment of the wreck of what had been her cabin, and thus mused—

“Strange, mysterious, incomprehensible, are the ways of Providence! In the pride of my heart I said I would hold no further communication with George Royston, my old friend and playmate. And yet he loved me well, and I—I—no, I could not have cared for him. But did I not? No, or I should not have thought of the Hon. Captain Fitzroy. But that was pride—pride and rank ambition. I scarcely knew my own mind. I said I would see him no more. I find him on the same ship—I scorn and insult him. In return, he saves my life. Not once—but again and again. And now, behold! we two are alone on board the ship together—the sole survivors of all the crew of the good ship Thunder. There must be more than chance in all this—

more than chance. Ah! but he is a noble fellow! So brave, self-sacrificing, and unselfish. Here he comes! How pale, weary, and haggard-looking, and how calm and determined! That man would go to his death with a smile on his lips."

Her looks expressed her admiration, but George Royston was too ill, worn, and weary to think of any such vanities now.

"I have found some tins of concentrated beef, or essence of beef," he said, "down in the store-room; that, with some biscuits and wine, will be the best thing we can take. As for me, I am utterly worn out—dead beat. I should like to see to the rudder to-night, but I fear it is impossible. I have neither spirit nor strength."

"Ah!" she thought, "you have plenty of spirit—it is only the strength that is wanting."

They seated themselves at the front of the mizenmast, and each ate sparingly of the biscuits and preserved beef, and drank some of the wine.

Then Royston, before he knew it, fell off into a deep slumber, and slept as soundly and peacefully on the hard deck as though he lay on a couch of down. She watched him in silence for some time, and then exhausted nature exerted its sway, and she too, ere she knew it, also dropped off into a heavy sleep.

It was just twilight, and with night the wind fell; by six bells in the first watch it was nearly calm, and the vessel lay lazily rolling, slowly hitching on what remained of the great storm. And there they lay, like babes in the wood, fast asleep, these sometime playfellows, lovers, then enemies, now friends again. They lay, and slept the sleep of the weary—alone, in a great ship, on the great ocean, at the mercy of the winds and waves.

The night came on, the dark storm clouds dispersed, the moon arose, the stars peeped out, the sea grew smoother, and the great rollers, with their threatening white crests, subsiding into pleasant little billows. The previous howling wind lulled to a gentle zephyr; the mists cleared away; the creaking and groaning of the ship, as she tossed and laboured, ceased, and all seemed to breathe peace and pleasant calm.

And still slept these two—slept till midnight came and

passed, and night began to give way to dawn—slept till the sun rose, and grew hotter and hotter, and dried the steaming decks of the Thunder. Without couch or pillow, these two weary, worn-out mortals slept as none could sleep who had not gone through such terrible fatigue, and whose consciences were not at rest. They slept till about a quarter of an hour before noon, when Helen Vandaleur awoke with a start.

## CHAPTER LXI.

### ROYSTON'S MANNER ALARMS HELEN VANDALEUR.

SHE rose quietly, desirous not to wake Royston, and went on deck. It was a glorious sunny day; the noon sun pouring down his warm, beneficent rays on the battered wreck of a ship, and seeming to smile on her, and promise better times.

Helen's dress and petticoats were, of course, wet, so she bethought her that there was an opportunity to dry them, while he—the only man on board—slept. She went forward to the forecabin, and took off her dress and some of her upper garments, and hung them in the blazing sun to dry.

She knew that under that noontide glare they would not take long; and, whilst they were so drying, she knelt down and returned devout thanks for her preservation hitherto, and prayed for a continuance of Divine favour.

The head-pump was still in working-order, so she proceeded to pump up water, and have a wash in very primitive fashion, without either soap, towel, or comb. In place of the latter, she had to use her fair fingers to arrange her long tresses, and was thus employed, when, looking aft, she beheld Royston standing at the top of the companion-way.

Ashamed and blushing at being seen thus scantily attired, she ran behind the foremast, and made haste to put on her clothes and dress, by this time dried by the heat of the sun. Then she went aft, looking as demure as possible, but feeling wonderfully refreshed in body and spirits. She argued thus—

“Surely Providence would not have brought us safely



through such hair-breadth 'scapes—have enabled us to sustain such hardships, pains, and miseries—unless it were intended we should ultimately be saved. I will not believe that it is all chance that has thrown us two together. My destiny is marked out for me, and the miseries I have undergone have been visited on me to punish me for my pride and ambition, and to cause me to appreciate as they deserve the love and heroism of George Royston."

Full of these thoughts, she walked aft, went into what was the cabin, up the companion-way, and joined him on the poop.

She started, and turned pale, as she looked at his face. His eyes were bloodshot, but bright, unnaturally bright. His face was no longer white and ghastly, but flushed; and there was an expression thereon that she had never seen before—could not understand now.

"Hullo! young woman! been having a wash?" he said, in a free-and-easy jovial manner, quite different from his usual style. "You look all the better for it—fresh as a pink!"

The words and tone startled her more than his appearance.

"Well, what do you say to some dinner?" he went on, in the same manner. "I'm hungry. I wish you'd see about it. You know that sort of thing is the woman's province in every household. And here we are, you see, all alone together—husband and wife. Ha! ha! ha! Who'd have thought it?"

Helen shuddered. This was very dreadful. Was he mad, and not responsible for his acts and words? Terrible question! Or was he sane, and knew what he was saying—what he was doing?

She knew and thoroughly understood the situation—that they were alone together on board the ship. This thought was even more terrible.

His manner, actions, and words utterly bewildered her. He seemed to know quite well what he was about, and gave her information where to find certain provisions, and so forth, in the store-room; and then, seeming to take it as a matter of course that she would do as he told her and get

dinner ready, set to work quite soberly and methodically in reeving tackles for the tiller.

Helen, far more downcast and disquieted now than she had been when in much greater bodily peril, nevertheless saw the prudence of providing a meal. Though she might not like his manner of ordering it, nor his words and looks generally, she had sense enough to know that it was necessary to eat.

So she went below, and got what food there was ready cooked, for there was no possibility of a fire at present, the cook-house there, and everything else on deck, having been swept away. Biscuits, butter, and preserved meat, and wine, was the meal, and by no means a bad one.

By good fortune she found, jammed up in a corner of the lazaretto, a small round table and a camp-stool. These she managed to get up on deck, although a month ago she thought it impossible she herself could have gone down the store-room hatch.

## CHAPTER LXII.

### THINGS ASSUME A BRIGHTER ASPECT.

THE situation was now an extraordinary one. There were those two young people alone on board a vessel, far from land—a mere wreck on the ocean—old friends and companions, old lovers; the girl owing a deep debt of gratitude to the man for more than once saving her life at the risk of his own, and with grievous bodily injury; and now there was this girl putting the whole length of the ship between them, avoiding him with terror and indignation in her face.

As for Royston, he worked on with a will. New strength seemed to come to his limbs, fresh energy to his will and mind. He worked and whistled, and seemed as jolly as possible; nor did he appear to feel regret for the terrible past, nor look forward to the future and their ultimate delivery from this state of isolation. All he seemed to care about were immediate necessities—making the cabin comfortable, and so forth.

He looked tolerably well ; and, notwithstanding the hardships he had undergone—the wounds he had received, the blood he had lost, and the pain he had suffered, there was a faint colour on his cheeks, and his eyes were bright.

This earnest preoccupation of his, on such comparatively trifling matters as making the cabin comfortable, and total neglect of the ship, leaving her with the sails which had been set torn to ribbons and hanging in rags, the rudder working to and fro at random, and the vessel drifting under bare poles whither the wind might drift her, was most strange and inexplicable.

For he was a smart and zealous seaman, and hitherto his first thought, almost his whole thought, indeed, had been to secure the safety of the ship, and to take her into port with her passengers all alive, her cargo and gold all safe. Hitherto he had never taken heed for his own comfort, scarce having rest and refreshment enough to keep himself in health. Now he seemed to think of nothing else, not even troubling himself to look at the compass.

By the expression of his features, he was not only contented in mind, but even cheerful, and in light spirits. He hummed snatches of songs and whistled, and now and then talked to himself, and laughed in a quiet way, as though highly delighted at something he had in prospect.

As the day wore on, it grew calmer and calmer, and the sea towards evening was very smooth, scarcely rippled by the light air which sighed over its surface. The soaked decks, yards, masts, rigging, and sails of the disabled ship dried up in the hot sun, and, but for the loss of her topmast-topsails and foretopmast staysail, the vessel would have been in tolerably good condition.

It is true she had a good deal of water in her hold, and was, of a consequence, much too deep in the sea. As for the wheel chains, which were not yet arranged, and so attached to the tiller that the rudder could be made use of, though he had neglected seeing to and finishing a task which would seem of such paramount necessity, yet it could be done easily and in a very short time by any one having so thorough a knowledge of practical seamanship as George Royston. And then, as things turned out, with the weather

fine, the sea smooth, and a light air little more than a calm, it did not much matter.

As sundown approached, Helen Vandaleur bethought herself that it would be necessary for her to procure bedding of some sort, in order to make the abode she had chosen anything like habitable. She was very sorely troubled in her mind—in fact, very miserable, and scarcely knew what to do. But she had sense enough to know that it was impossible for her to live forward altogether, and never go aft at all—impossible for her to hold no communion with him, although the more she thought of the situation the more terrified she felt. She knew that she had neither strength nor knowledge enough to provide for herself entirely, and that she must go to the cabin for food and so forth. Alas! that she must assist him, if he required it, in navigating the ship, although at the present moment he did not seem to interest himself in the least.

Nevertheless she resolved that right forward under the topgallant forecastle should be her quarters when she slept. So she made her way aft timidly, half afraid, but resolved to put a bold face on the matter, and take no notice of his strange manner, and careless, too familiar address.

He looked up as she came aft, and ceased working.

“Ah, fair Helen! is that you? Where have you been all this time? As for me, I have been hard at work.”

“Yes, I have been on deck,” she said, coldly. “It is very fine, thank Heaven!”

“So much the better. It gives me a good chance to make our cabin a perfect saloon of luxury. Wait for a day or two, and you will own, when I have finished, that it is a perfect gem.”

Our cabin! What could he mean, she thought, in thus coupling our name together? She tried to persuade herself that he meant no more by the expression than that, as they two were alone on board the ship, cabin and everything else was in common between them.

She had been down the store-room, although clambering up and down the hatch was not an agreeable task for a lady. The last time she had done so she remembered having seen a quantity of spare bedding, rugs, blankets, and such like,

and thought it probable that some remained, although she perceived that George Royston had got up a considerable quantity.

She went down, and by the little light which came through the small hatchway, she groped about until she found half a bolt of canvas, some rough blankets, like those of cavalry soldiers, a pillow, and a velvet cushion, or seat. These she handed up to the cabin deck one by one. She was thus employed when Royston came to the hatchway, and called —

“Helen!”

At first she did not answer, feeling indignant at being thus addressed. But she was much more so at his next words.

“Helen, my hearty, are you down there?”

Nevertheless, she had prudence and self-command enough to stifle her anger, and reply. For she knew that she was helpless—almost entirely dependent on this man for ultimate delivery from her present dismal position, and quite in his power.

“Yes, I am here,” she answered.

“Don’t you think we’d better see about supper?” he said. “As you are down there, you may as well look up what is wanted. I’ve got a small stove up from the lower fore-castle, and if you will get the provisions, I will rig it up and light it. You’ll find a bag of coffee and a half chest of tea right aft on the starboard side. You know where to find biscuits and butter, and preserved meat and dried fish, and you can bring up anything else you come across. Stay a moment, and I’ll get you a lantern.”

While he was gone she thought to herself—

“What he says is all proper and reasonable; but what means this insolent familiarity of his address—‘Helen, my hearty?’”

Her blood boiled at the thought that the daughter of Colonel Vandaleur, the belle of Sydney, worshipped and flattered by a host of admirers, should be thus addressed by a sailor—a merchant officer!

Her thoughts were bitter and contemptuous about him now; for by reason of his freedom of speech and strange manner, she had ceased to feel grateful for the many services he had rendered her.

However, she took the lantern, and while he went to arrange and light the stove, she proceeded to follow out his instructions, and get up tea, coffee, and other provisions.

It was exceedingly fortunate that the hatch of the store-room was on, and a tarpaulin over it, when she broached to, and the great sea broke on board, as otherwise, all the provisions, except those in casks or waterproof cases, would have been spoiled. As it was, they had abundance of everything.

She soon got what was required, and in half an hour she had spread a tolerable meal on the little table in the saloon. She had found crockery, plate, and a tablecloth, and altogether it looked very cheerful. The stove he had rigged on deck just under the break of the poop, the fire was lighted, and the water for tea and coffee nearly boiling.

Altogether things looked quite comfortable, and, indeed, as far as bodily condition was concerned, she had not been so well off for many a long day. Nevertheless, she was utterly wretched, as much so as when in the most deadly peril; and the cause of her misery was George Royston.

## CHAPTER LXIII.

### HELEN REMONSTRATES WITH ROYSTON.

HAVING done her part, Helen Vandaleur went up on the deserted poop, and looked around with feelings of inexpressible sadness.

The sun had gone down, and twilight was fast coming on, to be succeeded by night. She glanced at the wreck of the wheel, where, until the last terrible catastrophe, there always stood at least one man; then forward, along the waist and fore part of the deck, white and bare, clean swept by the rushing seas; then aloft, at the remnant of the torn sails, the broken spars, the ropes all in disorder; and as she noted these signs of neglect, solitude, and desolation, she heaved a deep sigh, and almost found it in her heart to wish that they were once again in the position of a week or so back—with the mutineers in possession of all the forward part of

the ship, and the saloon and cabins crowded with groaning, wounded, and weeping, screaming women.

Then Royston was a hero, a knight of romance—the object of her intense gratitude and admiration. And now, after all that had passed—all the dangers they had gone through together—all he had saved her from—now that they two were alone providentially saved of all the crew and passengers of the Thunder—she mistrusted, feared, almost hated him.

These sad and bitter thoughts passed through her mind as she contemplated what was little more than the water-logged hull of the one time fine ship Thunder. Next her eye swept the horizon, in the vain hope of discovering a sail. Then she sighed deeply, and hearing Royston calling to her in a loud tone of voice, went slowly and sadly down into the saloon, just as twilight faded into night.

He had hung a lantern up over the little table, and, as more convenient than the rickety camp-stool, had rigged a bench or seat with a back to it. This arrangement necessitated their sitting close together on the same side of the table. Helen drew back involuntarily as she saw how she must seat herself, if she did so at all. For the camp-stool was no longer to be seen, he having removed it.

“Come, fair lady,” he said, “deign to illuminate the festive board with the light of your lovely countenance.”

This familiar flattery by no means pleased her, nor the arrangement altogether. Nevertheless she thought it best to comply, and took her seat, taking care to place herself as far from him as possible. She ate little. He took nothing but half a biscuit, but drank a quantity of tea, into which he poured brandy. He seemed in the highest spirits, quite excited and talkative, in fact, which was to her, under the circumstances, very shocking.

“Charming weather—lovely weather! We ought to thank kind fortune for having granted us pleasant breezes and a fair sky for this, our first cruise. Come, why be dull? We have sole dominion over a fine ship, with stores, and cargo, and treasure. We shall be as happy as two love-birds in a cage—happy as the day is long. Nothing to trouble us; plenty of provisions, wine, and plenty of everything; for, of

course, in our position we have a right to broach cargo. You will want linen and clothes. The boxes you had in your cabin were all swept away by the big sea. You have other luggage down in the afterhold, have you not?"

"Yes," replied Helen, faintly, for she could scarcely speak for dismay and bitter annoyance, by reason of the manner in which he spoke.

Two love-birds in a cage! And apparently he seemed to rejoice and glory in the situation.

"Come along, then," he said. "You take the lantern; I'll very soon have the after-hatch off, and get some of your luggage up."

She obeyed, in spite of her indignation. This man seemed to exert a strange, a terrible influence over her. What would she not have given at that moment to have been able to fly from him? But it was impossible. As he had said, they were in a cage.

Her terror of him was mingled with another feeling—that of wonder. It seemed to her almost miraculous, how, after all the terrible fatigues he had undergone, the wounds he had received, the pain he had suffered, and the exhausted state to which he was reduced a short time back, that he should now be so vigorous in body, with bright eyes, a colour on his cheeks, and full of activity and energy.

He soon had the hatch off, and, leaping down, went to work among the boxes and packages in the afterhold, while she stood at the edge holding the lantern. She could not but look on with wonder and admiration at the strength, skill and vigour he showed in manipulating and moving about the heaviest packages, until he came to hers, which he very quickly handed up on deck.

Then, having procured these for her, he came up himself, and proceeded to drag them into the saloon. He perceived there were only two, while he had passed three up, but little was thought of it, supposing that she had herself taken the smallest one into the cabin.

Now, the fact was, that she, not forgetting her determination to take up her sleeping quarters forward, under the top-gallant forecastle, had taken advantage of the opportunity, and dragged it away forward.



When he had taken the other two into the cabin, she joined him, a little mollified and pleased—as what woman would not be, having been for some time without any change, or any of the many trifles the fair sex delight in, to have all at once a plentiful supply of clothes and linen?

“Thank you,” she said; “I am much obliged.”

“Oh! don’t mention it,” he said; “it is nothing; in fact, it is all the same. For are not we two alone on board the ship? Are not our interests one—our fates and fortunes bound up together? As the saying is, what’s yours is mine, and what is mine is yours. Come, I will take your boxes into the after-cabin, and you can there change your attire.”

He proceeded to drag one along the deck in that direction, but she stopped him, and cried sharply—

“No, no! I will not have it there. I insist on your leaving it.”

“Nonsense! you can dress and undress in the open saloon,” he replied, and proceeded to take it into the star-board after-cabin, notwithstanding her remonstrances.

She looked around and saw the state of affairs. She saw that there was no door to the cabin, only a piece of canvas hung across the entrance. She saw, too, that there was but one cabin—that he had made no other provision for himself.

“Come, come, my angel!” he cried, “bring the lantern, and see what a charming cabin and sleeping berth I have prepared for you.”

“No, no!” she almost shrieked, furious at being called “my angel.”

“Mr. Royston! please to come out here; I wish to speak to you. Come this instant, if you have any pretence to the name of a man.”

He came, looking a little surprised at her and the vehemence of her manner.

“I tell you, George Royston,” she said, “I would rather lay on the bare deck, with the sky for a roof, than go into that cabin, or sleep in that berth you have prepared. And in fact, I would rather die than accept any favour from you. There now, you know all. I shall go right forward and sleep under the topgallant fore-castle. I suppose, through the cir-

circumstances in which we are placed, we must speak ; but the less communication I have with you, the better I shall be pleased. And if you annoy me, I will leap overboard, so help me heaven !”

He listened, said not a word, but quietly went on deck.

## CHAPTER LXIV.

### ROYSTON BECOMES DELIRIOUS.

THE moon rose on a calm expanse of ocean. The stars shone out bright and clear, without cloud, or even the faintest mist to dim their lustre. And, save an occasional shoal of flying fish rising, and swimming swiftly for some hundred yards or so over the surface of the sea, nought was to be seen but water, sky, moon, and stars, and the lonely, desolate-looking Thunder, lazily heaving and tossing to the slight swell which always prevails even in the most perfect calm.

And on board that unlucky vessel, drifting with winds and currents in the mighty South Pacific, there were but two living beings, and these separated by the whole length of the ship—one studiously avoiding the other. A strange situation, truly, for two people, who had known each other from childhood, and who had gone through such terrible, almost unheard of, perils together, one of whom, too, owing the other a deep debt of gratitude for life itself.

Helen Vandaleur slept not. She had made herself a sort of nest or den under the topgallant fore-castle, with canvas and tarpaulins. It was a sort of tent, only that it had no roof, for it required none, the deck of the fore-castle forming that. It was open, looking aft, and from her chosen retreat Helen could command a view of the whole deck—waist, quarter-deck, the front of the cabin, and the poop.

She had dragged there the smallest of her boxes, and had carried there the contents of both others. Also she had provided herself with blankets, pillows, and in default of bed or mattress, several velvet cushions, and, all things considered, had made herself a tolerably comfortable abode. Moreover

she had procured half a bucket of water, and a quantity of biscuit.

This, however, was all she had in the way of provisions, so if she kept to her resolution of not going aft, she would not fare very well. And then she had no fire, no light, or the means of cooking or boiling water. And also, she should have remembered that, though at the present with lovely weather, almost a dead calm, the place was beautiful enough, it would be very different should it come on to blow, or even if a stiff breeze were to arise.

But she did not think much of the future, as is the way with women generally. She had been terrified, annoyed, angered at the present, by this Royston, and though, as a matter of fact, she might again require and have to seek his help and protection, she resolved to keep aloof from him—forever, she persuaded herself.

But she could not sleep. She sat up in the sort of nest of blankets and her own clothes she had made, and her eyes might have been seen gleaming out from the dark fore-castle like two bright stars. And so the night passed on.

And what of Royston? Ah! she had done him grievous wrong. In consideration for all he had done for her she might have been more merciful, more willing to make allowances for strangeness of manner, undue familiarity of speech. Moreover, her woman's wit should have enabled her to perceive the cause. She should have seen that he was not himself; but ill, feverish, excited—indeed, in some respects, almost delirious.

Now, the fact is, George Royston felt himself becoming ill. He knew that he was restless, nervous, feverish, and thought that a strong composing draught would be an excellent thing for him. The medical stores were down in the lazaretto, and, of course, he knew where to find them; so, although the medicine-chest had been swept away, there was an abundant supply of drugs at his command. So he mixed himself what he thought would act as a composing draught, and soothe his excited, nervous system.

Opium was the principal ingredient in the draught he took. He was accustomed to deal with drugs, and he had, on more than one occasion, acted as surgeon in the absence of one,

and doctored the sick on board ship. But though opium, in its various forms, is one of the most beneficent gifts of nature to suffering humanity, yet its effects vary with circumstances, and in different constitutions. As it happened, the dose he took had the not uncommon effect of the drug, of exhilarating, causing a sort of intoxication, and giving rise to visions and strange fancies, without in the least impairing his physical faculties. A smaller dose would not have had the effect ; a larger one would have cast him into a profound sleep. Meanwhile the fever gained on him, and gradually, with the exhilaration caused by the opium, there mingled a slight amount of delirium.

But as night came on he grew hotter and hotter, more and more feverish, less and less coherent in his thoughts and words. He could not sleep, could not rest, but felt that he must be continually on the move. Yet he was quite sensible. He bitterly felt Helen's scornful and angry words, though he forgot what it was he said which caused her indignation.

She did him great injustice ; his intentions were perfectly unselfish and honourable, and it was only the incipient delirium of fever, and the half intoxication of opium, which caused him to speak in the random manner in which he did. He could not help talking. Ideas kept flashing up in his mind, and thoughts that on ordinary occasions he would have kept to himself, or, at all events, have modified, he put into words.

He loved Helen, and he said so. He thought her beautiful, and he said so more openly than wisely. Nevertheless, his only intention was to provide for her comfort, and treat her with every respect. He had toiled all day to rig her up a cabin and make it comfortable, and the reason why he had not also made a berth for himself, was because he was so occupied with hers.

On his part he intended to have taken a couple of blankets and a pillow, and lain down, as he had many times before, on the bare deck. Such being the case, it is not surprising that he should feel bitterly wounded and annoyed by her cruel speech.

He went on deck, and as he passed the poop saw her

things forward, saw her provide herself with biscuits, water and blankets, and made all provision for living forward. For a time the sense of injury quelled, or at least modified, his feverishness and half delirium.

"Ah! she will not even eat in the same part of the ship with me, breathe the same air. So be it. Ingratitude, thy name is woman."

He walked the deck for hours, and presently saw her bright eyes looking out from under the dark topgallant fore-castle. The fever gained on him again. He felt as though his blood were on fire. His brain throbbed, his back and limbs ached, strange voices sounded in his ears, strange visions rose before him. But every time, in his walk to and fro the poop, he came aft, he would see those bright eyes, which, he thought, gleamed on him threateningly, like those of a she panther.

"Ah! false one—tigress—ungrateful! I defy you! I love you! I saved you, and forgot my own safety for yours, and you repay me with scorn. But a change must come. I will steer the ship to some lonely desert island, and there you and I will live forever—mine! mine! mine! It is ordained by fortune. No earthly power can keep us asunder. You shall be mine! Yes, mine, in spite of yourself—Queen of the Coral Islands. Ah! those eyes—those savage, gleaming eyes. Look not on me, she wolf! I know how to tame you."

He now grew rapidly more and more delirious and unconscious of his words or acts, as the fever gained on him. His distempered, excited brain created a body—a human shape to the two eyes. At first it was that of a bright, lovely angel, then the form gradually grew darker, and its shape altered, until he beheld a fierce, threatening, female fiend. At last he could stand it no longer, and rushed down into the cabin again.

"Ah! those eyes, those eyes, they burn right through me."

He paced up and down, faster and faster, and his talk grew louder and louder, and more incoherent. But it never wandered from the one subject—Helen Vandaleur. And presently she heard him talking to himself, and curiosity got

the better of fear ; so she stole aft on to the poop, kneeling at the top of the companion-way leading into the cabin, and listened.

## CHAPTER LXV.

## THE ESTRANGEMENT.

WHAT she heard did not tend to reassure her, or calm the apprehensions which, rightly or wrongly, she had conceived. His talk was wild and vehement, and the purport of it, so far as she could gather, was that he would take the ship to some fertile island in the South Seas, run her ashore, or sink her after landing what he chose from her, and that then he and she were to live together there as king and queen.

And this, as she understood from what was in reality his raving, was to be done, whether she was agreeable or not—without asking her consent. In fact, he would make her share his savage and solitary throne with him, whether she liked it or not. He spoke with a sort of triumphant satisfaction of thus bringing her to reason, taming her proud spirit, and, in fact, punishing her for her previous treatment of him.

She could not see him from where she was ; had she been able to do so, his flushed face, bloodshot, wild-looking eyes, and staggering gait, must have revealed to her the true state of the case, and she could not but have perceived that he was either mad or delirious. But as it was, she put down his vehemence and incoherence to ungovernable passion, and crept away to her nest more alarmed and indignant than ever.

“ I will jump overboard,” she muttered ; “ I will, I swear by all that is holy, if that man molests me !”

She was pale, haggard, tired to death with excitement and watching, and yet was totally unable to sleep. So she sat up, and watched, and listened to the sound of his ravings, which she heard at that distance as a low murmuring. Pre-

sently this ceased, and all was quiet. Then she heard her name called—

“Helen!”

“Insolent!” she said to herself; “how dare he call me?”

Louder he called again upon her name. But she made no reply, and all again was still.

The sun rose, and soon the cool night was succeeded by a sultry, tropical day. One hour or so after sunrise, she sank exhausted on to the rude couch she had made, and fell into a deep sleep.

George Royston, after she had left the companion-way, and again sought refuge in her retreat under the fore-castle, continued pacing quickly up and down the saloon, talking more wildly to himself minute by minute, gesticulating, staggering in his gait, and obviously getting worse and worse.

Ere long the delirium was succeeded by a giddiness, a dull, heavy pain in the head; he tottered as he walked, and presently fell heavily to the deck of the cabin; but he managed to rise again, although he felt a terrible giddiness and faintness coming on him. The delirium left him for a time, and he was presently conscious; he knew that he was very ill, and would be worse; he knew that he was alone in that dreary, desolate cabin, the scene of such direful tragedies; he knew that he was fast losing his senses—that a deadly faintness was coming over him—that his eyesight became dim, his hearing dull, his breathing oppressed, and that a terrible weight seemed to press on his brain; he was conscious of a sombre darkness closing around him, and gradually destroying all his faculties.

“Is this, then, death?” he said to himself; “ah! if it is, welcome grim liberator. Oh! my head. Oh! I faint.”

Then there swept over his mind a horror of dying alone, uncared for, with no one to give him a drink of water or soothe his last moments. He felt, he knew, that he would soon be unconscious, incapable of standing, perhaps even of speaking. He staggered, he held on to the mast to prevent himself from falling. A deadly terror of struggling alone in the agonies of death in that desolate saloon seized him, and he called aloud upon Helen.

No answer; and after waiting some moments, his strength failed him. Utter darkness closed around him, and he fell senseless to the deck. In falling he struck his head against the woodwork, and the blow opened afresh his wound, and caused the blood to flow. This was so far fortunate that it relieved his overcharged brain, and presently he began to recover from the swoon or fit in which he had fallen. To recover, however, not to reason and sober consciousness, but in a burning fever—delirious and raving.

As the day passed on the fever grew worse, but the sufferer became weaker, until his one time loud ravings grew fainter and fainter.

Miss Vandaleur did not wake till late in the afternoon. She looked out on the deck—it was deserted. She listened, and could not hear a sound.

"He is asleep, probably," she said. "I will not disturb him. I have enough here for all my wants."

So she took a frugal meal of biscuit and water, made her simple toilet at the head pump, changed her attire, dress, underclothing—everything, for she had now plenty, and then went on deck.

It was still nearly calm, a light air blowing, as she judged, from the north-west. She went aft, and listened at the cabin. She could not see him, but was able to hear a faint muttering.

"He sleeps, and is talking to himself," she said.

Then she took a long and anxious survey of the horizon, hoping, longing to see the wished-for, prayed for sail, which should release her from her present wretched position, but in vain. Then she went forward, and busied herself, as women always can, with the clothing in her boxes.

Evening came—then night.

"I am glad he still sleeps," she said. "The less I see of him the better, until Providence shall send a ship across our track to take us off this dismal wreck."

There were myriads of stars in the clear vault of heaven, now illuminated by a clear bright moon.

Miss Vandaleur was now nearly renovated in health. Rest and sleep had wonderfully refreshed her vigorous constitution. She had a small mirror in one of her trunks, and con-



sulting it, she saw that though still thin and wan, there was a faint colour in her cheek, and that her eyes were bright and clear.

After so long and sound a sleep, she did not feel disposed again to seek her couch, so paced the deck, occasionally stopping to listen for any sound to denote he was moving.

"Soundly he still sleeps," she said to herself; "so much the better."

Midnight came and passed, as she found by consulting her watch, which she had kept constantly going all through. Still no sign of life or motion in the cabin. She went aft and listened. She could no longer hear the sound of his mutterings.

She felt a little uneasy at this prolonged sleep on the part of her companion on the wreck.

One, two, three o'clock came, and still all was quiet aft. She began to grow tired and drowsy herself, and betaking herself to her couch was soon fast asleep.

## CHAPTER LXVI.

### THE DISCOVERY.

ON the third day of her sojourn in the Thunder, alone with George Royston, Miss Vandaleur awoke about noon. The sea seemed smoother, the sky clearer, the rays of the raging sun hotter than ever before.

It was soon a dead calm. No breath of wind sighed over the ocean to cool the sultry, oppressive air. The vessel heaved and swayed very slightly to the almost imperceptible swell.

Just after performing her ablutions, arranging her hair, and attiring herself becomingly in white muslin—for a woman, no matter what the circumstances, is never indifferent to her personal appearance—she went on deck, and walked aft.

"I suppose now I must meet him," she said to herself,

“Face him, and, if need be, defy him, and keep him at his distance.”

But she saw no signs of him. He was not on the quarter-deck or poop, and a silence, as of the grave, reigned in the cabin.

Helen now felt a little uneasy, spite of herself. She went to the companion-way and listened. Not a sound. Then she descended a few steps—still all was silent. She now became alarmed, and plucking up resolution, went down into the cabin.

At first she thought there was no one in the saloon, so she went aft to the cabin he had fitted up for her, and standing outside the canvas screen, called him.

“Mr. Royston!”

No answer.

“Mr. Royston!” she called again—this time louder.

Still no reply.

Then, after a few moments’ hesitation, she pushed on one side the canvas screen, and looked in. She had expected to have seen him asleep in the berth, but there was no one in the cabin at all. She let the canvas screen fall back over the doorway, and stood aghast.

“Good heavens! what can have become of him? He is not on the deck—not here! Where can he be! What can have happened to him? Can he have fallen overboard?”

At this moment she was forced to acknowledge to herself her true sentiments. Fearing something must have occurred to him, she was dreadfully alarmed and distressed. For, despite of all his offences, and her anger against him, she would sooner have lost her right hand than that any evil should befall him.

And then, too, there swept over her soul a sense of utter desolation and solitude, and she felt that, though she hated and feared him ten times as much, she would rather have his company on board than be utterly alone.

So true is it that no one can tell beforehand what would be their feelings under certain circumstances. A day before she said to herself, persuaded herself, that she would infinitely rather be alone in the big ship on the trackless ocean, than have him for a companion. Now that it seemed as

though it were indeed so, she found the difference. Never did she feel so utterly miserable and desolate as at this moment, when she thought she was all alone on board the Thunder.

Pale, trembling, scarce knowing what she did, she moved slowly toward the companion-way, with a vague hope that she might find him on deck. All at once her eyes fell on something right at the fore part of the cabin. A dark object on the deck.

Her vision had now become accustomed to the light in the cabin, which, after the blazing glare of the sun on deck, seemed dim, and, going forward, she soon discovered that it was the prostrate form of George Royston.

In an instant she was by his side—in another on her knees beside him.

He lay on the bare deck, without pillow or anything whatever beneath or over him; his head was in a pool of clotted blood, with which his hair was dabbled; he was deathly pale, and for a moment her heart stood still, for she thought he was dead. But a low moan escaped him, and she soon perceived that he breathed.

She took his hand; it was hot and dry, and feeling the pulse, she found it beat with tremendous rapidity, though it was feeble: his forehead, too, was hot, and she at once perceived that he was in a violent fever, and that the pallor of his face was caused by loss of blood.

Now that he was helpless, ill, and in pain and danger of death, a total change in her feelings towards him took place. She pitied him, yearned to soothe his pain, and minister to his recovery. She felt all at once calm, self-possessed, and collected.

The first thing she did was to get a pillow for his head, then water and some linen rags to wash away the blood from his face, and bind up the reopened wound from which the blood had flowed.

Presently her eyes fell on the woodwork against which he had fallen, and she saw that it was splashed with blood.

"Poor fellow," she said to herself, "he fell against this, and hurt his head, again breaking open the old wound."

But then the thought occurred to her—why should he fall

I know he is not a drunkard, and the ship had little or no motion.

Pondering over this puzzle in her mind, all at once the solution came—not bit by bit, by degrees, but like lightning's flash.

She did not stay to reason, but knew instantly that she was right. She gave vent to a cry of pain and remorse.

"Good heavens! what a cruel, inhuman wretch I have been. He was in a fever all the time: it has been coming on for days; hence his wild talk—strange, and as though familiar, manner. He knew not what he did; he was half delirious all the time; and, when he felt the dread disease about to overpower him—when he felt himself losing his senses, then he called for aid; and I—ungrateful wretch that I am!—paid no heed. I remained sulking forward, and he fell and lay insensible, weltering in his blood, devoured by the fierce fever—left alone to die. Ah! if he had only consciousness enough to know, what a she-fiend he must have thought me, to leave him alone to die! He did not so desert me in my hour of need. Life, health, rest, everything, he risked and sacrificed for my sake, and this is my return!"

She burst into a passionate flood of tears. She kissed his hot forehead, pressed his parched dry hand in hers.

"Oh, George Royston, I love you! If it pleases Heaven to spare you to me, it shall be the study of my life to atone for this my cruelty and injustice!"

## CHAPTER LXVII.

### ROYSTON'S RECOVERY.

"AFTER a storm there comes a calm," is an old and oft-quoted saying. It applies alike to the human passions and feelings as to the waves of the sea and the winds of Heaven. The same lovely weather, smooth ocean, and gentle pleasant air prevailed, in striking contrast to the succession of terrible storms which had lately swept over the unlucky Thunder.

So it was with Helen Vandaleur. She tended the sick man

with the utmost assiduity, and with such care, patience, and skill, that on the second day after she had discovered him he showed obvious signs of mending. The fever took a turn, and gradually faded away; his brow and hands were less hot, and a slight perspiration breaking out in the skin bespoke the change.

It left him, however, in a fearful state of weakness, so much so that he could not raise his hand to his head – could not turn himself on the couch she had prepared for him. She had succeeded in forcing some strong soup, made of essence of beef, of which she had discovered a supply, into his mouth, and also a glass of wine.

After swallowing this he fell into a deep sleep, nor woke for fully twenty-four hours. She watched him carefully all this time, scarcely leaving his side, except to prepare a little refreshment for herself, or to look around on the broad expanse of ocean in hopes of discerning a sail.

What rest she took herself was on a cushion and pillow close to him, so that she could hear his slightest cry or movement.

Helen was now comparatively happy. A delightful calm had succeeded the stormy passions of anger, indignation, fear and hatred, which before possessed her. She had accounted to herself for his strange manner, by the fever which devoured him, and which she had been stupid enough not to perceive.

Though she blamed herself bitterly, and at first was greatly grieved and shocked, she soon got over that, and was only too glad at being able to exculpate her hero—for such, indeed, he was to her—from all intended insult or offence. She doubted not she would easily be able to make her peace with him, the more so, considering their singularly isolated position. She did not imagine that he had taken it so deeply to heart, as was the fact, nor that his memory would be so keen.

Day after day passed on with still the same calm, mild, delightful weather. The ship drifted whither the light airs and the ocean currents took her. Helen had not the slightest idea as to where they were, nor in what direction the ship was drifting

Royston regained consciousness on the fifth day after the catastrophe. For some time after he awoke from his sleep, he knew not where he was, what had happened, nor who it was who so carefully fed and tended him. But on the morning of the sixth day he was a little stronger, and entirely recovered both his senses and memory—indeed, the latter was preternaturally accurate ; he had not forgotten the smallest circumstance of what had occurred.

He remembered her scornful and insulting refusal to avail herself of his kindness. Lastly, he called to mind how, when he was low and sinking under the terrible disease, when he felt his strength and senses failing him, he had called to her for help, and she had refused to come.

"She is here now, and wishes me to recover, I doubt not. But why? Because in my health, strength, and nautical skill rests her only hope of ever being taken off this unlucky ship."

He judged her harshly, unjustly, as the reader knows ; but then it was not without reason or excuse. But whatever might be his thoughts, he resolved to keep them to himself, and accept her aid in regaining his health and strength.

"For," he argued, "it is no favour she confers on me. I have earned it as a right ; for have I not sacrificed and suffered much for her? Saved her from certain death at the risk of my own life?"

There was no doubt about the truth of this, so Royston felt quite easy in his mind. Rapidly he began to gather strength under her watchfulness ; and the young officer could not but own that she was a most skilful and tender nurse.

When he was able to sit up and talk, he spoke without reserve or embarrassment ; having, as he thought, made his resolve and laid out his plans, he had no reason to be either shy, ashamed, or even thankful for her care. For, as he speculated to himself again and again, he had earned it all, and more.

Still, when he observed the many little instances of watchful care for his comfort, the many little tendernesses, the ceaseless vigilance she observed, and the self-denial she practised in depriving herself almost altogether of rest, he could not but feel softened towards her. But he maintained his

resolution firmly, and neither thanked her by deed, word, or look.

Helen could not but notice that his manner and speech, though free from anything like embarrassment, was cold and indifferent in the extreme.

"Ah! poor fellow," she said to herself, striving to account for this, "it is caused by the fever; it has numbed all his faculties and sentiments—the spirit has suffered as well as the body."

Comforting herself with this, she watched with delight how fast he regained physical vigour and strength. He had a wonderful constitution and power of recuperation. On the second day after the fever left him he was able to stand; on the third to walk without assistance; and on the fifth he went on deck for several hours and basked in the rays of the pleasant afternoon sun. The long spell of fine weather was wonderfully in favour of his quick recovery, and, indeed, everything seemed to go well for him.

Exactly twelve days after the disaster—which resulted in the sweeping away to a sudden death all hands on board the Thunder but himself and Miss Vandaleur—he considered himself in perfect health.

He was down in the cabin consulting an outline chart, which he had found among the luggage of one of the passengers down the hold, and which had so escaped being swept away. A quadrant, also, he had thus obtained, and had that day taken an observation of the sun to get the latitude.

Miss Vandaleur suddenly came running down the companion ladder.

"There is something on the starboard side!" she cried. "I do believe a ship!"

## CHAPTER LXVIII.

### THE OCEAN WAIF.

HE hastened on deck, and she pointed out to him the object she had discovered. It puzzled him a good deal. His

nautical eye told him that it was not like the upper sails of a ship, and, at such a distance, that would be the only thing visible of a vessel.

Royston had no telescope, so could not form any definite opinion as to what it was.

The vessel's head was now to the eastward, and the object bore nearly due south. There was a very light air from the northward, and she was drifting, kept up broadside to the wind by means of an old sail. He did not wish to steer her to the south, and, therefore, hove her to as well as he could, until a favourable breeze should arise.

During his convalescence, and with Helen's assistance, he had rigged fresh tiller-ropes, and by means of tackles, purchases, and a small winch affixed to the mast, had command of the rudder, and could heave it either to port or starboard, though only slowly.

He now took down the jury-sail he had rigged, and he and Miss Vandaleur proceeded to hoist the flying-jib. Then he shifted the helm hard over to the other side. This had the effect of making her pay off before the wind.

Next he went aloft and loosed the foretopgallant-sail, and some of the light sails. This caused the vessel to sail along before the light breeze—very slowly, it is true—perhaps a little less than one knot an hour.

By the time he had done this the sun had gone down. He found that the vessel would keep before the wind without any one at the helm, which was a great consolation, as, with no wheel, it was no easy task to move the tiller, and required the exertions of both of them.

"When do you think we shall be near enough to see what it is?" she asked.

"Not before daylight," he replied.

"But the moon?"

"It will be down by midnight, and with this wind we shall not be close enough to make it out then. No; we certainly shall not know what it is till daylight."

"I will keep watch," she said.

"No. I will keep the first watch, and will call you when I am sleepy."

She yielded to him in this, as she did in everything now.



He spoke in a grave quiet manner, totally without emotion of any kind, which seemed to say—

“I am commander of this ship, and you but a passenger, notwithstanding all that has happened, and I mean to exert my authority.”

So he did not ask her to do anything, but told her to do it—ordered her, in fact—with perfect politeness, of course; but still Helen felt annoyed, and would almost rather he had been a little more familiar and affectionate.

She could even have forgiven, perhaps, if he had addressed her in what she before thought a too familiar manner, and it is possible even she would not have been very angry if he had called her “dear Helen.”

She remained on deck a short time, and then went below and lay down, dressed as was her wont.

She had endeavoured to atone for her previous error and offence by occupying the after cabin he had prepared so carefully for her, and had taken an opportunity to thank him for his kindness. But he only bowed, and said coldly—

“Don’t mention it, pray, Miss Vandaleur.”

As for himself, he had constructed a sort of cabin in the fore part of the saloon, in which he had a berth. She no longer feared or affected to fear him, and felt thoroughly ashamed of her former conduct.

He called her about three hours before daylight, intending to leave her on the watch and take some sleep himself, which, only just recovering from an illness, was absolutely necessary.

“You will find it rather cold on deck,” he said, “so I have taken you up a couple of blankets. Besides, there is a dew falling, so I would advise you to take a seat in front of the skylight on the poop, and cover yourself well up. Call out when you see the first signs of dawn.”

“Is the sail ship, or whatever it is, in sight?” she eagerly asked.

“No,” he replied. “It is misty, and we certainly shall not see anything of it till daylight.”

Then he went to his berth, and she on deck.

Following his advice, she made herself as comfortable as possible, and gave way to thought.

The events of the past few weeks—months—years—she passed in review before her mind, and the more she pondered the more plainly it became evident to her that she had behaved badly, cruelly, infamously, to the young man who, one time at least, had loved her so truly.

She resolved to make amends for the future, and then his cold, reserved manner occupied her thoughts.

"When once again," she said to herself, "we are among our fellow-men and women, saved from this desolation—as I feel sure we shall be—I will so express my sorrow for the past, and my gratitude for all that he has done for me, that he cannot but forgive me. Besides, I don't believe he is angry; nay, he is always very kind. It is only his manner; he is chilled and low-spirited from the effects of the fever."

Then, from the past and present, her thoughts flew to the future. And now she committed a grave dereliction of duty.

According to George Royston's advice, she had made herself as comfortable as possible; so comfortable that she dropped off to sleep on her watch.

Awaking in terror, she cried—

"Mr. Royston! Mr. Royston! Quick—get up! Do come on deck. We are quite close to it. A boat! a boat! Oh! I am so frightened!"

And indeed she looked so.

## CHAPTER LXIX.

### RETRIBUTION.

ROYSTON awoke and was on his feet in an instant, and immediately ran up on deck at once. He saw by her excited, frightened manner that something of importance had occurred. It was broad daylight. The sun was up and had dispelled the night mists. The wind had shifted from the north more to the west, so that instead of heading to nearly due north as heretofore, she was now slowly tacking in a

north westerly direction, and as a consequence most directly towards the object they had seen overnight.

It was now nearly abeam on the starboard side, but slightly towards the bow.

Looking there, a strange and extraordinary sight met his eyes. At first he gazed with surprise and uncertainty; then a sort of gleam of intelligence came over his features.

Miss Vandaleur, closely watching his countenance, saw next a look of awe and horror.

What he saw was a boat with several figures in it. A small open boat.

"What is it?" she asked him, timidly. "Those men in the boat seem all asleep."

He turned to her and said, solemnly—

"Miss Vandaleur, the finger of Providence is in this. Do you not know that boat?"

"No," she replied.

"I do."

"What boat, then, is it?"

"It is the lifeboat of the Thunder—one of the boats in which the mutineers left the ship."

"And those men?"

"Those are the corpses of such of the mutineers as trusted their lives to her."

She shuddered and turned pale.

"Great heavens! Providence has indeed watched over and protected us. While we—I a weak girl, and you a wounded and sick man—are now alive and well, those strong men, of whom I was once in such deadly terror, are dead."

"It is as you say. It is intended by a higher power than any on earth that we shall yet be saved," he said, earnestly, solemnly.

"Yes, yes, I feel it—I know it."

"Come, help me to lower this mast," he said, abruptly finishing the conversation.

"What are you about to do?" she asked.

"Do you not perceive that the wind has fallen till it is almost a dead calm, and that what little air remains is slowly but surely shifting to the south. Now, with only ourselves, and the vessel in such a state, we can only sail her in a di-

rection nearly before the wind, which will be directly away from the boat."

"But why not heave her to, as before?" asked Helen, who divined that he was about to entrust himself to an open boat, and who dreaded the thought of his encountering what she thought such peril.

"We should still increase the distance between the ship and the coast, for we should drift to the northward."

"And you mean to go in that little boat?"

"Certainly. It is my duty. There may be some of the gold on board her."

"And you can think of gold at such a time as this?" she said, reproachfully.

"Not for myself," he replied, quickly. "But it is my duty, as the only surviving officer of this ship; it is my place to save all I possibly can of her cargo and stores. I have done my duty hitherto," he went on, "and I will do it please God, to the end."

She looked at him earnestly, in unfeigned admiration.

"This is indeed a man," she thought, "noble-minded, unselfish, and brave as Bayard. And I, who owe him everything, scorned and insulted him!"

"Come, Miss Vandaleur," he said, rather impatiently, "help me to lower the boat."

She sighed, and proceeded to obey his orders.

In a short time the boat was lowered, a pair of small oars, a mast, and sail placed in her, and she was dropped astern, where he could lower himself into her easily over the taffrail.

He next proceeded to lower the flying jib, clew up the light sails he had set, and get the juriesail set on the mizen mast, and shift the helm hard over, so as to bring her up to the wind—to heave her to, in fact, on the starboard tack, with her head to the eastward. The boat, with its ghastly crew, was now on her starboard beam, distant about a mile or a little more.

These things done, he at once prepared to get into the boat.

Helen, who had been wishing to speak to him, yet ashamed and fearing to do so, mustered up courage enough.

"You really mean to risk your life in an open boat, Mr Royston?"

"Risk! there is no risk. The sea is smooth; there is but a very light air, and I can row five times as fast as the ship drifts."

"But you are not strong; you are but just recovering from that dreadful fever."

"Oh, I am strong enough for that," he said, carelessly.

"But suppose a sudden faintness or giddiness should come over you?"

"What is the use of supposing all sorts of improbable misfortunes?" he answered, rather sharply.

"Oh, pray do not go—pray do not leave me all alone on this great ship!" she pleaded, with clasped hands, and tears in her beautiful eyes.

George Royston saw her distress was real, and felt sorry for her.

"Miss Vandaleur, I must and will do my duty."

She knew it was useless to urge him further, and desisted.

"There is one thing more I wish to ask you," she said.

"Well?"

She coloured and looked confused, for his reply was not encouraging.

"Before you leave in what may prove a perilous enterprise, let me have this satisfaction—that we are friends."

She paused for a moment.

"Certainly," he replied.

"Let me know, feel assured, that you forgive me for any unkind words or actions."

"Certainly," he replied again, in the same calm, cold tone of voice.

"There is a coldness between us. I know I have been very wrong, very insulting, very ungrateful; but I am only a silly, weak, vain, and somewhat too proud girl—you a strong man. Come, George Royston, let us be friends."

As she spoke she offered her hand, which he did not take.

"Miss Vandaleur," he replied, "I have thought we'll over this matter. I grant that we are not on the terms we

have been—I grant that there is a certain coldness between us. It was very different in the old days, as you well know. But a cloud has come between us, the shadow of which can never be removed. We are not suited to each other. You are too proud and susceptible, and ready to suspect and impute evil motives. I am too proud, also, in my way, and too matter-of-fact. But I loved you. I have striven, and I think successfully, to quench, to smother that love. At all events, I prefer that things should remain as they are. We cannot be strangers, under the circumstances; there is no reason we should not be friends. I will be captain of the ship, you my chief officer—Lieutenant Vandaleur.”

He smiled at this little pleasantry, took her hand for a moment, and then hastily lowered himself into the boat and cast off.

“Whatever you do, don’t move the tiller,” were his last words, as he moved off, “or I am a lost man.”

## CHAPTER LXX.

### THE SKELETON FREIGHT.

ROYSTON did not suffer his resolution to be changed by the words of Miss Vandaleur, though he could not but feel impressed and more favourably disposed to her. However, he did not waste his time in thinking or speculating, but, at once seating himself at the oars, rowed towards the boat.

He did not look round until he was quite close, and then he was induced to do so by a peculiar odour.

A horrible sight met his eyes. The boat was tenanted only by corpses. Dead bodies of the mutineers in all sorts of positions just as they had died.

Nine of them altogether he had counted. They were all in a state of decay; but the odour was not so offensive, nor the putrefaction so complete, as would have been the case had it not have been for the scorching rays of the sun, which had dried up and almost mummified the bodies.

The faces and hands of all had been picked out to the

bone by sea-birds, and the eyes torn out. The skulls, too, were quite bare, and altogether this boat-load of corpses presented a most hideous and ghastly appearance.

Coming suddenly upon him as it did, George Royston for a few moments stood aghast, horrified, and staggered back.

"What a sight!" he cried. "I could almost fancy these fleshless skulls were animated. Yes! there is the corpse of Death's Head Dick himself. I recognise the jacket in which he left the ship. At last he has met his just doom."

The dead body of the ringleader of the mutineers presented a terrible spectacle. He was sitting up in the stern of the boat, leaning back; his head and face were picked quite clean of flesh, and his eyeless orbits were turned upwards towards the sky. The birds of prey had picked off the flesh wherever it was not covered by clothing, leaving a rim of raw flesh and skin just at the collar of the shirt and coat.

The effect was most horrible, and for a moment or two George Royston could not bring himself to approach nearer to the boat with its dreadful load.

But he saw boxes and bags of gold carefully stowed in the stern, and determined to do his duty—conveying what remained of the treasure back to the ship. Accordingly, he rowed alongside, and made a closer inspection, and came to certain conclusions as to how the death of the mutineers was brought about.

"She is a lifeboat," he said to himself, "and moreover is buoyed up by bags of cork, so can neither upset nor sink with a moderate cargo. I see they have only taken a part of the gold, leaving the rest in the bigger boat with the rest of them, who doubtless perished also, and that sooner than these men, for the longboat could not float so long in a storm. These men were certainly not drowned. What, then, was the cause of their death?" he asked himself, and quickly found an answer.

"Hunger, thirst, exposure, and exhaustion. The seas constantly washing over her, filling her, spoiling all their biscuit, and they soon drank all their water. They were blown out to sea by the gale, and perished long before they

could get back to the land they had sighted, and which induced them to leave the Thunder."

Having thus decided to his satisfaction, the young officer proceeded to work.

"Not a pleasant task, certainly," he said to himself, with a sort of shudder; "but it must be gone through."

He now took the boat-hook, and set to work getting the corpses out of the boat. He now perceived for the first time that there were several large sharks about the boat.

"These voracious monsters should not gorge on their bodies, villains and murderers as they were, if it were possible to help it; but it is not."

After several vain attempts to put the body of Death's Head Dick overboard, he at last hooked the boat-hook into the collar of the jacket, and lugged the corpse out and into the sea.

Instantly there was a great commotion in the water, a rushing and plunging amongst the vultures of the deep, and in a minute or so a few rags of torn clothing were all that remained of Dick Smith, the ringleader of the mutineers of the Thunder.

One by one he served the others in the same way. It was not without a good deal of trouble, however, that he cleared the boat of the dead bodies, and committed them to the sea. Some of the mutineers had only woollen shirts on, and those tore away from the boat-hook. So, though with great repugnance, he was obliged to lay hold of these and pull them out with his hands.

It took him quite half an hour; and so busy was he occupied that he did not observe the change which had come over the aspect of the sea and sky.

When he started from the ship heavy rain squalls were in sight on the horizon. And now, during the last three-quarters of an hour, the heavens had become overcast, and there were rain squalls all around, some quite close. The water could be seen descending from the sky in torrents, dark streaks and lines of rain being plainly visible between the clouds and sea.

All over the surface of the ocean, at a distance of a mile or so from the spectator, every object would be hidden from



sight by the rain mist, which, as the squalls united and spread, extended all round the horizon.

A brisk, cold breeze, too, sprang up, and the murmuring roar of distant rainfall, and more distinct pattering of nearer squalls, could be heard.

It was obvious that this part of the ocean was about to be visited by one of those tremendous downfalls of rain, only to be witnessed in the tropics.

Electrical action seemed to have something to do with it, for lightning flashed and darted from cloud to cloud, followed by rattling peals of thunder.

The dim outline of a waterspout could be seen at some distance, descending like a great curved column from a dense black cloud towards the sea, where its lower extremity was hidden by the mist and foam of the troubled waters.

All these things Royston took in in a few seconds, and felt a little disquieted.

"I'm bound to get a drenching," he said to himself, "that's quite certain. Now I'll make all haste, and tow this boat to the ship."

He looked around. The Thunder was not to be seen. This was by no means surprising, as there was nothing to be seen now, even a mile distant, but torrents of rain, clouds and mist—it being impossible even to discern the surface of the sea.

Almost at the same moment the rain began rattling down, until the boat was deluged with a perfect torrent.

This, too, was not alarming ; but there was one thing which caused him some uneasiness—the rain brought with it a strong breeze.

He had no compass—no means of telling north from south, east from west.

Again he eagerly scanned the surface of the sea, hoping to discern the Thunder through the gaps or intervals between the rain squalls.

She was nowhere to be seen.

## CHAPTER LXXI.

## DESPAIR.

THE lifeboat from which he had dragged out the dead bodies had already a good deal of water in her, so, instead of wasting time in uselessly gazing around for the ship, he at once went to work to bale her out—this being the more necessary from the flood of water which was pouring into her.

It occupied his attention, and also prevented his feeling cold from the drenching rain and sharp wind which accompanied it.

Half an hour passed, and the rain began to moderate as the squall passed away.

A stiff breeze still blew, however, and having finished baling out the lifeboat, he again took a careful look all round, to try and discover the ship, or even to make out the points of the compass by the position of the sun in the sky.

But neither sun nor ship was to be seen.

"Patience—patience!" he said to himself; "some of these rain squalls must pour themselves out, or the clouds be borne away by the wind before long, and then I can make sail for the Thunder."

This reminded him that the lifeboat contained the gold, and was in every respect the safest and most suitable of the two. So he shifted the light mast, sail, and oars from the cutter, fastened her astern of the lifeboat, and changed.

Next he employed himself in shipping the mast, and preparing to set the sail the moment the obscurity should clear up, and let him know where he was.

While he was thus employed, a gleam of sunshine suddenly shot through the clouds.

"Now for the Thunder," he said; "the sun will tell me in which direction she lays."

He thought to ascertain by the position of the sun which was the north and south; having done so, he could easily

tell in which direction the ship lay, although she might be quite invisible by reason of the mist and rain.

When he left her he knew that he rowed in a south-easterly direction to the corpse-laden lifeboat. Consequently the bearings of the Thunder must be north west from where he was. And if by the sun he could ascertain the northern point the rest would be easy.

Unfortunately, however, it was but the most transient flash of light, and before he could look up a dense mass of clouds swept over the sun, not leaving even a trace of light by which he could tell whence came the momentary gleam.

This was annoying—disappointing; but even yet Royston felt no fear, though he was just a little uneasy. For even this slight feeling he reproached himself.

“What a nervous fool I am!” he said to himself. “I can’t lose the ship. She may drift a half mile or so, but she’s hove-to with the helm hard a-lee.”

Then suddenly flashed across his mind a thought, yet scarcely a thought. It was as though an unseen something whispered the terrible suspicion in his ear.

“Suppose she were to shift the helm?”

The consequence of such a thing he well knew. The ship would instantly pay off before the wind.

Why should he imagine that she would interfere with the helm, or alter his arrangements? He could not tell; he had no reason whatever. Yet the thought forced itself on his mind so strongly as almost to amount to a presentiment.

“If she has, I am lost! must perish miserably of thirst and starvation like those wretches I have just given for food to the sharks. With this wind—even with scarce any sail set, the Thunder would make three knots an hour, running free.”

So strongly was he impressed by this strange feeling—warning—presentiment, whatever it might be—that he at once hoisted the sail, trimmed it to the wind, and seated himself at the tiller.

It was not till the boat began to gather way and cleave the sea, now rippled by a brisk breeze, that he bethought himself of the absurd folly of what he was doing.

“Fool and coward that I am!” he said, springing up, and

letting go the halyards of the sail ; “ my insensate feats have taken away my reason. I don't know in which direction the ship is, and may be sailing right away from her.”

So he rolled up the sail, and set himself down patiently while it should clear up, and enable him to discover the ship.

It was neither pleasant nor lively ; he had only a woollen shirt and canvas trousers, and the pouring rain of course drenched him throughout. Moreover there was a brisk, cold breeze, which blew in fitful gusts, and seemed to increase rather than abate.

Thus an hour—an hour and a half—two hours passed. The young officer was now wet, cold, miserable, and ill at ease in his mind, for he did not at all like the look of affairs, the prolonged obscurity giving him just ground for uneasiness.

The ship, with a stiff breeze, might drift at a considerable pace. And it was possible also that she might be caught in some eddy or current and swept away. More than three hours had now elapsed since he had seen her or even knew in what direction she lay.

He calculated that it was now getting on to noon. There was nothing for it but to wait patiently.

Presently the rain began to abate, and gradually one by one the squalls and clouds were dissipated by the increasing power of the sun, and blown away by the wind.

One hour passed, and the horizon was visible for about half the circumference. But no signs of the Thunder. He anxiously waited and watched, eagerly scanning each clear space as the rain squalls and clouds were swept away or dissipated by the rays of the sun.

Bit by bit the whole horizon became visible. A terrible thought occurred to him—that the Thunder had sunk, for he could not see her.

There was still a small part, about a fifth, of the horizon hidden by rain squalls and mist, and his only hope was that the Thunder was in one of them. They were fast disappearing, and already the rays of the sun began to have a powerful effect.

He took off his wet shirt and spread it out to dry, and

then baled out the rain-water from the boat. When he had done this he again took a survey around.

A cry escaped him—a cry of dismay! He remained standing as one entranced for a few moments, and then there broke from him, in accents of agony and despair—

“God of Heaven! she has shifted the rudder, and the Thunder has sailed away before the wind! I am lost—doomed to the fate of the wretches I have just committed to the sea!

His former terrible forebodings and uneasiness, amounting almost to a presentiment, were in this case terribly confirmed. For, in truth, Miss Vandaleur had shifted the tiller, and so caused the ship to sail away from the unfortunate young officer, leaving him to the mercy of winds and waves, without food or water—a veritable waif upon the ocean!

After a bit he began to recover from the stupor into which he had been thrown by the discovery of his wretched and apparently hopeless situation.

“Oh! woman, woman!” he cried, bitterly. “Incarnation of ingratitude, cruelty, vindictiveness! Helen Vandaleur, you are indeed terribly avenged!”

## CHAPTER LXXII.

### THE THUNDER SIGHTED.

For a time, George St. Cymon Royston—known as Simon the Sailor—was stunned by the magnitude of the calamity which had befallen him. Without food, even a biscuit—without water, without covering or clothing of any kind—nothing, in fact, except what he stood in. A straw hat, a pair of canvas trousers, a blue flannel shirt, a pair of tight shoes, a belt, a sheath knife. These were all he had in the world.

Thus equipped, he found himself alone on the ocean in an open boat, far from land, out of the track of ships, and without even the means of knowing the latitude and longitude.

A mast, and sail, and six oars he also had at his command;

but the former belonged to the boat towing astern, and was far too small for the lifeboat.

Then there was the gold to the value of many thousands of pounds; but as affairs now stood, useless lumber, worse even, a dangerous encumbrance.

"I repulsed your advances, wounded your pride, and thus infamously and treacherously have you taken your vengeance. But all is not lost yet. While there is life there is hope, and even if I am doomed to perish miserably, I have this satisfaction—it is scarcely possible that the she-fiend who has betrayed me can save her life. The first gale, or even breeze of wind, must bring about the sinking of the ship, for she can, of course, do nothing even to keep her afloat an hour."

Royston now again looked in a nor'-westerly direction. The ship was not out of sight, but that fact gave him little comfort. She was "hull down" twelve or fifteen miles away.

His nautical eye could tell by the trim of the yards, and the appearance of what he could see of her upper spars, that she was going before the wind.

He now set to work with a will, stopped the mast, hoisted and trimmed the sail, and then seating himself on a thwart, rowed vigorously with a pair of small oars. This he kept up for quite an hour until he could no longer bear the scorching heat of the sun on his bare back, and was forced to pause, in order to put on his shirt, which he had spread out to dry.

Then he took another long and earnest survey of the situation. The sky, a short time before overcast and pouring down torrents of rain, was now almost cloudless, and the tropical sun blazed down in all his ardent glory. The boat, although swamped and drenched with the rain, was now dry as a chip.

Royston had bitter reasons now to lament his shortsightedness in having baled out all the fresh water which had fallen into her, which, although a little brackish, from admixture with the small quantity of salt still remaining, would have served to quench the thirst which already began to torment him.

The result of his survey was not encouraging. The ship

was still in sight—still standing in the same direction before the wind. She did not seem to be further off; indeed he thought he had succeeded in gaining on the vessel a little.

But this was poor consolation, after an hour's such exertion. Quenching the thirst, which each moment increased, was now his first object; and a close examination of the bottom of the boat showed him that there were about two gallons of brackish water, the remnant of the rains which he had been unable to bale out. He could not get at it with the baler, so lay down on his stomach and took a good draught.

Somewhat refreshed, he again set to work with a will. But before doing so, he dipped the shirt he had spread out to dry in the sea before putting it on. This, he hoped, would have the effect of keeping his body cool, and also preventing thirst.

Again he slaved away at the oars, and after another hour, once more took another look at the distant ship. She was certainly nearer, there could be no doubt of that; for he could now plainly make out the maintop.

The boat was gaining on her, so he took another draught of water, and once more set to work, a little encouraged and hopeful. But though his courage was undaunted—indeed, his spirits had risen—his physical energy and strength declined. The strokes of the oars were no longer so vigorous, and he found himself compelled to pause every quarter hour or so to fetch his breath. And after an hour's rowing he felt so utterly exhausted that he was fain to throw himself at the bottom of the boat, and lie there panting until a little rested.

Then he again took a drink of water. He noticed that it did not seem much diminished in quantity, if, indeed, at all. But in taste it was more brackish—quite nauseous, in fact. The cause of this he quickly discovered. The boat leaked, and the salt water was fast mixing with and spoiling the fresh. Here there was another disaster imminent, and one there was no means of remedying, for it was impossible to stop the leaks in the boat.

Almost desperate, he again seized the oars, and rowed with all his strength. When next he paused and looked ahead,

the ship was about in the same relative position. He had held his own and no more !

It was now well on in the afternoon. Hope began to give way to gloomy anticipations, and black despair seemed about to enfold him. He went to drink as before, lying on his stomach. The water was salt and very nauseous, and he could with difficulty swallow a few mouthfuls.

Again and again he seated himself at the oars, and rowed for dear life. But his strength was fast leaving him, the spells at the oars became shorter and shorter, and at last, utterly worn out and exhausted, he gave it up.

It was sundown. And this poor worn out, brave-hearted sailor, laid him down to die. He was parched with thirst, and had no water. The violent exertion and anguish of mind had brought on a return of the fever.

Night would soon close in ; the wind was failing, and he had no strength to row any more. The ship was still miles and miles away, and he despaired of ever reaching her. All hope left him.

"God forgive you, Miss Vandaleur," he muttered ; "I cannot !"

## CHAPTER LXXIII.

### HELEN VANDALEUR.

AND while George Royston lay utterly worn out, parched with thirst, without food, and hope all gone, Miss Vandaleur was safe on board the big ship, with provisions and everything she could need in abundance.

He had but too good reason for feeling towards her a bitter indignation--hatred even. For had she not been his evil genius? Had she not deceived, jilted him? scorned and insulted him?

For her sake he had shipped on board the Thunder ; he had watched over her--protected her--guarded her from every danger he could ; he had saved her life at the deadly risk of his own, and been badly wounded in doing so.



In return for all this she had again scorned and insulted him—refused even to use the cabin he had at great labour and in total abnegation of himself, prepared for her.

And this was the reward for a second time saving her life! for had he not almost dragged her into the higher rigging when a terrible sea swept the decks, or she, too, must have been lost?

And this was the end of all! Deliberately, wilfully, she had shifted the helm—let the ship pay off before the wind, and left him to perish!

These were the last thoughts of George Royston as he fell off into a state of half sleep—what the doctors call coma.

As to the wilfulness of her act of treachery there could be no doubt, for he had particularly warned her not to interfere with or shift the tiller.

. . . . .

But what of Miss Vandaleur all this time?

Was she happy and contented in view of the prospective fate of her old lover, friend, and, at the time he left the Thunder, only companion?

Let us see.

She stood right aft by the taffrail, and watched the progress of Royston towards the other boat with deep interest.

A strange medley of thoughts and feelings had sway in her breast. She was angry and indignant at Royston's refusal to accept her offer of a more cordial understanding between them.

She was fearful for his safety, and watched as might a mother her child on dangerous water in an unsafe boat. She experienced, moreover, a feeling of utter loneliness and desolation.

She was alone—alone—alone!

The one man with strong arm and brave heart, who had so long protected her, was no longer there!

She was alone, deserted, and perhaps she would never look on his face again.

These and other such-like dismal thoughts caused the

tears to start to her eyes, and, clasping her hands, she prayed fervently for his safe return.

And this was not a selfish prayer, for at the time she thought not of *her* safety, but of *his*.

So the reader will perceive that though George Royston might have good reason for thinking she had wilfully and treacherously deserted him, he was in error.

It happened thus: Helen Vandaleur stood and watched his proceedings with breathless anxiety. She saw him come alongside the corpse-laden boat—saw him make a careful inspection, and, with horror, she beheld him haul out the corpse of Death's Head Dick with the boat-hook.

She uttered a faint cry at the dreadful sight, and hid her face with her hands, at the same time almost involuntarily retreating a step or two. As she did so her foot came in contact with a coil of rope, and she fell backwards. In falling, her shoulder caught against the rope which kept the tiller hard a lee.

The rope was strong enough to have stood against half a ton, let alone a slender girl. But the belaying pin to which it was made fast was rotten, and broke short off.

She fell to the deck, and the tiller instantly went over, and wobbled about at random as the waves washed the rudder.

The ship, released from the controul of the rudder, which kept her hove-to broadside to the wind, payed off, and soon began to gather way, sailing right away from the two boats.

When Helen Vandaleur rose to her feet, a little bit shaken and confused, she did not at first understand what had happened.

But soon she saw the relative positions of the boat and ship were changed, and then her attention was attracted to the tiller, which oscillated backwards and forwards without any control.

Then she missed the rope extending across the starboard side of the deck, against which she had fallen, and then, observing the broken belaying-pin, the whole truth burst on her.

She knew that by accident she had done the very thing against which he had particularly cautioned her. If mad

and frantic efforts could have repaired the mischief, all would have been well.

She did her very utmost to haul the tiller back to its former position. But alas! she had not the practical knowledge how to avail herself of the mechanical power of the pulley, as adopted in the sailor's "tackle" and purchase, and the rudder, washed by the waves, easily resisted her puny efforts.

She knew not what to do. She could see that the vessel was sailing away from the boats, and yet was utterly powerless to prevent it. And when the rain squalls, and clouds and mists closing in on the scene, hid Royston from her sight, she was perfectly distracted, and scarcely knew what she did.

Few women are gifted with the power of acting coolly in desperate emergencies, and her grief and terror quite overpowered her reason.

Had she thought of it, she might have diminished the speed of the ship, now sailing away from the unfortunate young officer, by cutting the ropes of all the sails, and so bringing the vessel under bare poles. Had she done so, it would have turned the scale, and Royston, instead of gaining only slightly on the ship when he rowed with all his might, would have come up with her.

But as it was, she rushed hither and thither like a maniac, wringing her hands and weeping hysterically; and presently she had another and severer fall; for in one of her half-frantic runs she tripped at the break of the poop, and fell on the quarter-deck. There she lay insensible, bleeding from the head.

## CHAPTER LXXIV.

### THE CASTAWAY.

HELEN Vandaleur, more through want of presence of mind than ignorance—for she was quick-witted and had picked up a good deal of nautical knowledge—failed to take

any effective means to prevent the ship from sailing before the wind.

There was no spread of canvas to speak of but the remains of the top and foretopsails, the mainsail and topgallant sail hanging loose in the buntlines, and not furled with the jureymizen, which had been set, caught a good deal of wind, and running before the stiff breeze, the Thunder made over two knots an hour.

The drenching cold rain had the effect of awakening the young lady to consciousness sooner than would have been the case, for the fall was a severe one, and she received, besides the shock, a bad cut and bruise on the head.

When she staggered to her feet—as wet through as though she had been immersed in water—her shoes and clothes clinging to her and chilling her to the very bones—she found that the sea all around was perfectly obscured by mist and rain.

The boats were not to be seen, and still the Thunder sailed away.

She knew not how long she had lain insensible, and even now that she had recovered consciousness she felt numbed, chilled, and totally bereft of all energy.

She knew not what to do, and could only wait, hope, and pray for the obscurity to be cleared away, and once more to behold the boat and Royston in safety.

The day passed on, and at last the clouds began to clear away. While Royston was eagerly scanning the expanse of ocean—standing on a thwart of the boat, and shading his eyes with his hand—hoping to discover the ship, Helen Vandaleur, from the poop of the Thunder, with anxiety as breathless, in suspense as terrible, as that of the unfortunate castaway—was straining her eyes in the hope of seeing the boat.

As the reader knows, Royston presently discovered the vessel at a great distance, and instantly commenced rowing with all his strength and energy.

But, from the fact of the boats being such small objects, and with no height above the surface, she was unable to discover them—they were in fact not in sight from the deck. Had she mounted to the topgallant-yard, and scanned the

horizon with a telescope, then she might have perceived them—mere specks on the ocean.

Utter and blank despair took possession of her when she could no longer hide from herself the terrible truth—that the ship had sailed away and left the unfortunate young officer to his fate.

She was alone on board a big ship, with but little hope of ever seeing land again.

But what was her fate to his? She had water, clothing, provisions in abundance, and moreover shelter from the cold winds and rain, and the scorching sun; while he, unhappy man, was left in an open boat without even a biscuit.

Visions of his terrible fate—perishing slowly of thirst and starvation—rose before her, and she cried aloud in the agony of her heart.

She could not weep. The tear fountains were dried up by the extremity of her horror and despair. She could do nothing but pace the deck, wringing her hands, uttering frantic prayers, incoherent exclamations of grief and despair.

And all this time George Royston was rowing for dear life, desperately trying to decrease the distance between himself and the ship.

But the power of the wind in the sails and rigging was sufficient to defeat his efforts, and keep the ship and boat in about the same relative positions.

Had Miss Vandaleur been collected and keen enough to have taken a sharp knife, climbed aloft, and cut the sails from the yards, even the rags of the topsails, it would have had the effect of so retarding the speed of the vessel, as to have enabled George Royston to gain on her fast, and in the course of an hour or so her eyes would have been gladdened by the sight of the lost boat.

But it was not to be. Fate had decreed otherwise. So we will leave Helen Vandaleur to her solitude, misery and despair, and return to the open boat, drifting about on the bosom of the South Pacific.

That night, again, heavy rain fell, which had the effect of awakening Royston from his state of half stupor, half sleep. He at once took off his shirt, hung it so as to catch the

greatest possible quantity of water, and then wrung it out into the tin baler.

Delicious was that draught of not particularly clean rain water to his parched throat, and though he had tasted no food for about thirty hours, he felt refreshed and invigorated.

Could he have seen the ship, or even if he had known in which direction she lay, he would have taken to the oars again. But the darkness rendered that impossible, and he was forced to wait till daylight should enable him again to take a survey of the broad expanse of ocean.

When the sun arose in all his glory, dispersing the darkness and mists of night, a terrible blow awaited him.

The ship was no longer in sight! Not a speck on the horizon to denote where she was.

Again and again he gazed with startling, eager eyes, and even climbed the mast to have a better view. But nothing hopeful rewarded him, and the terrible consciousness forced it on his understanding that he was indeed alone, that the ship had sailed or drifted away in the night to unknown regions, and that he would never see the ship, or Helen Vandaleur, or, indeed, any human face again.

There was little or no wind, and every promise of a sultry, scorching day. He had, during the night, saved a little water by catching it in the sail, and by wringing out his shirt into the tin baler.

The baler, however, only held a little over a pint, and he had already encroached on that small quantity. As for food, there was not a bit, not a scrap of any sort whatever.

His position was now as gloomy and hopeless as it was possible to conceive. It seemed to him useless to exhaust himself, and bring on a fevered, burning thirst, by rowing in the full glare of the sun. For the ship not being in sight, he might be rowing away from her.

So he sat him down, made a sort of tent of the sail, to shield him from the sun's rays, and awaited his fate with as much fortitude and equanimity as he could command.

And the sun rose in the sky, reached the meridian, then sank in the west, and the night came on. He had no water left, and there seemed but small prospect of rain.

And now, tortured by thirst, and beginning to feel the pangs of hunger, he despaired utterly, and prayed that the end might soon come, and death terminate his sufferings.

## CHAPTER LXXV.

### HOPE.

AND while our unfortunate castaway is slowly perishing by hunger, thirst, and exposure in an open boat on the broad Pacific, the Thunder slowly sailed, and drifted away.

Her mast's rigging caught slight currents in the upper air, which did not reach the surface of the sea. Consequently she was always sailing or drifting, always had some little motion through the water, often less than half a knot an hour, but still enough to remove her further and further, slowly and surely from that part of the sea where was George Royston in the open boat.

He slept through the night with his head pillowed on bags of gold, treasure under him, around him, enough to purchase a small English town, and yet he was perishing from hunger and thirst.

When another morning broke, he stopped the mast and hoisted the sail.

"I will let her sail whither the wind chooses to take her," he said to himself. "As for me, I will lay me down again and die."

There was a light breeze, and so it happened that boat and ship were both sailing along; but unfortunately, even if able, he could not guide the boat, and steer her in track of the ship, for he knew not where she was.

He had caught a little water in the night, and there remained about half a pint. He drank all at one gulp. With an hysterical, half-delirious laugh, he cried aloud—

"My last drink of water, or anything else in this world, for there will be no more rain! Come death! grim deliverer, and kind friend! Farewell, Helen Vandaleur—traitor, murderer! God forgive you—I cannot!"

And then, with the full belief and certainty that death must come soon, and put an end to his sufferings, he laid him down to die.

. . . . .

And the great ship, also with a solitary passenger, crept slowly along on the bosom of the ocean.

That solitary passenger presented a strange spectacle. Her clothes, drenched with rain, all in disorder, hung about her attenuated form like cerements; her face, haggard and pale, seemed more like that of a ghost than of a human being—a young woman; her hair hung about her neck and shoulders, all disordered and uncared for; her eyes looked unnaturally large, and gleamed with bright, feverish light, which gave an extraordinary expression to her wan, frightened face.

And, moreover, there was a strange, wild look—a nervous restlessness of manner, which seemed to indicate that it was not only the body that suffered.

She had eaten nothing, and drank only water, since the ship sailed away from the boat.

If frantic prayers, wild, frenzied appeals to heaven, could have helped the castaway, she would have been long since saved.

To say that she slept would not be true. Occasionally, utterly worn out, she would seat herself by the bulwarks, and drop off into an uneasy dose, from which, after a few moments, she would start up with a scream of terror, and uttering incoherent words, would run forward or aft, as though pursued by some frightful object or phantom.

The whole of the day she spent in restlessly moving about, anxiously gazing around the horizon every few moments, in the vain hope of discovering the boat.

At night she could not see, of course, and a strange expedient occurred, and by no means a foolish one. She would take a can of water (no solid food passed her lips), and seating herself on the topgallant forecastle, close to the ship's bell, would keep on tolling it slowly till the dawn again appeared and revealed to her that there was nothing in sight.



She knew that a ship's bell would be heard a great distance at sea, as she had witnessed a case in point, and thought that should the boat by any possibility approach within half a mile of the ship, and should the vessel happen to be driven by the wind in the neighbourhood of the boat, George Royston, though he could not see the Thunder, would hear the bell, and so be made aware that there was a ship close by.

It was but a faint hope—a forlorn hope—but in adopting this measure by night, Helen showed considerable shrewdness. At times she would drop off to sleep while at her self-appointed task; but in less than half a minute she would awake with a start, and again the dull, solemn booming of the bell would toll out over the desolate ship and the great ocean.

It would have been strange indeed if body and mind had not suffered under such privations, and such a strain on the faculties.

Food she could not touch, loathing it when she tried at times to eat even a little biscuit, although she had taken nothing since the evening before the disaster to the boat and to George Royston.

Symptoms of mental disorder, of delirium, even of insanity, began to manifest themselves on the second night after that fatal morning.

But still she toiled on, and with brief intermissions of a minute or so only, did not cease till the dawn of day came. During the heat and glare of that third day, spent all alone on board the Thunder, she wandered to and fro—into the cabin—on the poop—forward—then aft—talking wildly, incoherently, madly, and ever and anon thinking aloud.

The worst had come, and Helen Vandaleur was now insane, or at least perfectly delirious.

It is a strange fact that when the mind suffers, hardship, privation, injury, even seem to have a less effect on the body.

Helen Vandaleur had been three days without food, and yet she still had strength to walk the deck in that incessant restless manner peculiar to people with disordered intellects, and so terrible to behold.

The third night of desolation closed in on the unfortunate Thunder, and the wretched solitary passenger.

Notwithstanding her delirium and wild ravings, Helen Vandaleur did not forget the bell ; but with eyes dreadful to behold, from their brilliancy, contrasting so sadly with the wan, haggard face, she seated herself, and commenced the dismal, monotonous tolling.

The night passed on—midnight came and went—and still the bell went toll—toll—boom—boom.

It was about four bells in the middle watch (2 A. M.) when Helen Vandaleur suddenly started to her feet, gazed with starting eyes, and listened intently.

“A voice ! a voice !” she cried aloud. “I heard a voice.”

She waited, but could hear no sound.

“Ah ! the voices of the dead—of the spirits, of ghosts of another world !” she cried, wildly, “come to summon me to join them. But I defy them. Ha ! ha ! I am captain of the ship ! Toll the bell—toll the bell—toll the bell for the dead !”

Then again she seated herself by the bell and all the while murmuring to herself incoherently, she commenced again tolling and striking it as hard as she could.

There was a brisk breeze now, and the Thunder was gliding through the smooth water at the rate of fully two knots an hour.

All at once she again started up and listened.

A faint sound, as of a human voice, came across the sea.

Again she struck the bell as hard as possible, and continued to do so for fully two minutes.

The sound came from ahead, it seemed to her.

On a sudden she seemed to have recovered her faculties, for she knew if such were the case the ship must be each moment approaching nearer to the spot whence came that voice.

After a spell of tolling, she again sprang to her feet, gazed out ahead, and listened. Then, plainly, beyond all possibility of mistake, she heard a hail in a hoarse, gruff voice—

“Ship ahoy !”

## CHAPTER LXXVL

## BOARDING THE THUNDER.

"SHIP ahoy!"

This time the hail was louder—more distinct.

Miss Vandaleur gasped for breath. Her brain whirled, and she was for a time nearly incapable of speaking, or of making any sound whatever. Then she burst into a fit of hysterical laughter, and instead of answering the hail, she shrieked aloud—

"Ship ahoy!"

Once again came the hail over the water.

Then, suddenly, a fit of reason seemed to return to her. She ceased laughing, crying, and shrieking, and ran as far forward as she could to the port cat-head, and vainly endeavoured to peer through the darkness and discover the vessel from which doubtless the hail came.

But in vain—she could see nothing.

Once more came the hail, and now she nerved herself sufficiently to be able to reply.

"Hallo!" she cried, at the utmost pitch of her voice.

"Heave-to, for the love of heaven, and I will board you," she heard in the same voice.

"Heave to!"

The order or request utterly confounded her.

It was because she could not heave the vessel to that the boat had been lost.

She had no power to heave the vessel to, or prevent her sailing whither the wind might waft her.

"What ship is that?" was the next question from the strange craft. Doubtless it was thought that the Thunder was being hove-to.

"The Thunder—all hands lost but me, a woman."

Then there followed a dead silence, and a terrible apprehension took possession of Miss Vandaleur,

She could not heave the ship to or stop her way, and the other vessel would let her pass in the darkness.

There was a lantern burning in the waist of the ship, for Helen dreaded utter darkness, and had sense enough to trim and light this before her reason quite left her.

And now, in this lucid interval, she had strength and sense enough to run to this, and hang it up in the main rigging, so that it could be seen over the bulwarks.

Then she again raised her voice, and cried—

“ Help ! help ! ”

No reply.

She fell on her knees, and, with clasped hands, gave up such a passionate, frantic prayer, as sure no unhappy mortal ever did before.

And all at once she heard the splash of water, and then a regular, monotonous rattle of oars in the rowlocks.

“ Saved ! saved ! ” she shrieked, as she heard a boat come up alongside.

“ A rope ! a rope ! ” was uttered in a hoarse voice from the boat.

She had strength enough to throw a rope's end over at the gangway, and to belay the standing part.

There she stood, and with wildly glaring eyes awaited the coming of those who might prove her saviours.

She heard the boat bump against the side of the ship, and thus ejaculated—

“ Saved ! saved ! God be thanked for his mercy ! ”

Then all at once there flashed across her excited mind a terrible memory.

A vision of a solitary man, dying of thirst and starvation in an open boat arose before her.

“ Wretch that I am—cruel and ungrateful ! Royston, George Royston, where are you, my own love, my only love ? ”

Then, with eyes absolutely glaring with horror, she beheld the spectre of the man whom she had called for. She had invoked his spirit, and the ghost had responded to her summons.

Slowly she beheld the head, shoulders, and body of a man raise itself above the bulwarks at the gangway.

She saw a face cadaverous and ghastly as that of any corpse. The head was bound up, and there were horrid stains, as of blood, on the deathly pallid features.

Slowly the phantom raised itself higher and higher, till she could see the whole figure down to the knees.

It uttered no word, but gazed at her fixedly with hollow eye, gleaming with fierce anger and threatening fire.

She gazed as one spell-bound, unable to remove her eyes from the dreadful shadow. Then her senses began to fail her. A shriek of horror and mental agony broke from her.

"A ghost! a ghost!" she cried. "The ghost of George Royston!"

Then she swooned, and fell forwards utterly insensible.

## CHAPTER LXXVII.

### REUNITED.

HELEN VANDALEUR, as related in the last chapter, fell forward, and her head would have struck against the rail but for a circumstance now to be noticed.

At the moment that she fainted the figure came down on the deck, and she fell into the arms, not of ghost, spirit, phantom, but of George St. Cymon Royston himself, alive in the flesh.

But for the fact that the supposed ghost certainly caught her, and prevented her from falling, a looker-on might, indeed, have thought that this was a visitant from the spirit-world.

Indeed, the two, Helen and the young officer—looked more like corpses brought from a graveyard, and, by necromancy, endowed for the time with the power of speech and motion, than living, breathing, thinking human beings.

He was the thinner, and more skeleton-like of the two, for he had not yet recovered his flesh after the fever from which he had but just recovered, when he was left alone in an open boat.

As to the faces, there was not a pin to choose between them. Both were haggard, ghastly pale, hollow-eyed. But Royston's eye, though light, was clear and steady, while her's blazed with the fitful gleam caused by a disordered mind, and had that peculiar restless, wandering glance, so sadly familiar to all who have seen madness in any stage.

Physically, Helen Vandaleur had suffered less than Royston; for, though she had eaten nothing for three days, she had not suffered the torments of thirst.

The lantern's dim yellow light shone on these two—both looking haggard and wan enough for corpses, and the girl utterly insensible—to all appearance veritably dead.

Royston, himself as weak as a child, allowed her to slip from his arms, and laid her on the deck. Then he took the lantern, and made the best of his way to the cabin, staggering along with uncertain gait—even compelled to lay hold of the rail at times to prevent himself from falling, so utterly were his vital forces exhausted.

"I can do nothing for her now—nothing!" he muttered. "If she has only fainted I will see to her presently; if she is dead, she is dead, and God forgive her! As for me, I must have water and food, and wine, for I can bear up no longer."

It was fortunate for him that he found wine and biscuits in the cabin, on the table he had erected; for it is quite certain he could not have gone down into the store-room to procure anything, such was his state of weakness.

The wine was a red Burgundy Macon, which had most of the invigorating qualities of port without its fire.

There was no water; so, seizing the bottle, he placed it to his mouth, and drained it nearly dry. It acted as food and drink, and enabled him, by moistening his parched throat and tongue, to eat a little biscuit.

Then, after resting a few minutes, he took the bottle in one hand, the lantern in the other, and made his way back to where he had left Miss Helen Vandaleur on the deck.

Kneeling beside her, he poured some wine into her mouth.

"She is not dead—she breathes!" he said to himself.

"Good—she will come round soon. As for me, I am utterly worn out, and must sleep."

So he calmly placed the lantern on the deck, and the bottle, in which there was still a little wine, beside it.

Then he proceeded to make the best possible arrangements for his comfort and repose.

"She is asleep now," he said to himself, "her regular breathing proves that. If I could help her I would, although she deserves no mercy from me, the traitress! But as it is, I don't see how I can do her any good, so I will make her useful to me—I want a pillow."

Then he coolly laid his head on her breast, and in half a minute was fast asleep.

Any one, to have seen these two sleeping people, would have thought they were on the best of terms—a loving husband and wife, or brother and sister.

Whereas the fact was that the man thought the girl was his deadly enemy, and had done her best to betray him to his death.

So they slept—he with his head pillowed on her breast, she lying calmly and contentedly, also in a deep slumber.

It was an extraordinary scene—a subject for a great painter—those two pale, ragged, worn, and haggard figures, with the yellow lantern light glaring on them—alone on the deck of the dilapidated hull of the one time good ship Thunder. So they lay, both in a sleep as of the dead, till the lantern waned and flickered, and, just as dawn appeared in the east, finally went out.

The sun rose and shone upon them, but they awoke not.

Helen Vandaleur was the first to show signs of returning consciousness. As her sleep grew lighter and lighter, she began to murmur to herself, then to talk, incoherently it is true, but still her words bore on the situation.

"George Royston—Simon the Sailor—saved! saved! My own love!—my own love!"

Then she opened her eyes, and began to sing in a low voice.

Presently he, too, awoke.

## CHAPTER LXXVIII.

## A MOMENT OF PERIL.

ON first opening his eyes, George Royston thought he must be still dreaming, or mad, or had passed altogether from this earth into the world of spirits.

His head was still on the bosom of Helen Vandaleur. One of her arms was around his neck, while with the other hand she gently toyed and dallied with his hair.

She was singing in low, monotonous tones, but still with a soft melancholy in her voice which went to his heart.

For I will marry my own love,  
My own love, my own love ;  
For I will marry my own love,  
And who shall say me nay ?

The words of her lullaby, the fact of her having her arm around his neck and caressing were sufficiently astonishing to him, who looked upon her as a deadly enemy.

But her further behaviour absolutely astounded him. After murmuring the monotonous but musical song for some little time, she approached her face to his, and gently kissed his forehead, his cheeks, his lips.

He was perfectly sensible and collected, and the act absolutely bewildered him. That Helen Vandaleur, so proud, so sternly haughty, so coldly chaste, as he had always known her, should thus grow suddenly amative, and not shrink from avowing her love, was bewildering, astounding.

He knew not what to make of it, how to understand or account for it, and tried to persuade himself that he was mad or dreaming.

But he could not succeed in doing so. He saw the ship, the torn sails, the broken masts, the dilapidated appearance of the decks, the lantern, the bottle with the remains of the wine, and could distinctly remember all the occurrences of the previous night. So he knew that he was both awake and perfectly sane,



As for Helen Vandaleur, he had no suspicion of the real facts of the case, and it was not for some time that the terrible truth burst upon him. Then it came, as is usually the case, all at once, like lightning's flash. He happened to catch her eyes, and was appalled at the brilliancy of them, and, also more deadly symptom still—the wild, restless, staring gaze.

“Angels and ministers of grace defend us!” he exclaimed, “she is mad—stark, staring mad!”

For a minute or two the awful discovery rendered him incapable of acting or even thinking. He lay with his head still on her breast—still letting him toy with his hair, and caress him.

And still she kept up the monotonous, melodious refrain—

“For I will marry my own love.”

And indeed his position was a strange one. Saved by almost a miracle, as it seemed to him, from perishing in an open boat from sheer thirst and starvation, he found himself on board a water-logged hulk, with no other companion than a mad woman.

He gently disengaged her arm from around his neck, and rose to his knees. She clung to him.

“No, no, my own love—my own love! You shall not leave me,” she cried, clutching his shirt. “I have waited for you, prayed for you! now you are my own—my own! We will sail away—away, far away, and I will be queen of ten thousand islands, and you shall be king.”

“Helen Vandaleur,” he cried, sternly, as he with some difficulty disengaged himself from her, “remember yourself. Think of your father, your position, your womanly pride and modesty, and do not talk so.”

She rose to her feet, and stood before him with clasped hands, the picture of despair and misery.

“Ah! you are angry with me,” she said, in wailing, pleading tones. “Then let me die—let me die at once! Yes, I will die—I will jump into the sea! It is so calm and smooth. I shall find peace there. No wicked men—no hateful gold; only beautiful fishes—dolphins and mermaids!”

She walked quickly to the fore-castle, and was climbing up, when Royston, now fully aware of her mental state, caught

her by the skirt and pulled her back, fearing that she really would do as she said, and jump into the sea.

"Miss Vandaleur," he said.

"No, no! Helen—call me Helen! Always Helen to you."

"Helen, for heaven's sake come down! Come with me aft. Your hair and dress are all in disorder; besides, it is breakfast time, and I want you to provide."

He spoke thus, hoping to divert her from her purpose, and was more successful than he could have expected.

"How stupid I am to be sure!" she said. "I had forgotten that you wanted your breakfast. I will soon lay the table for you. Will you take tea or coffee?"

"Tea, I think—tea," he said, only too glad to humour her. "Come, I will light the fire in the stove, while you prepare the table."

She ran aft, and was soon busily at work.

George Royston observed with pain her haggard look and wild eyes, and was surprised at the amount of energy she showed.

She was much stronger than him, which might be accounted for by the fact of her not having suffered so much.

The fire in the little stove was soon made, water boiled, and a hot meal prepared, of which both partook. Miss Vandaleur, who hitherto had not eaten, appeared to relish the food. As for George Royston, it seemed to put new life in him.

There was boiled ham, biscuits, butter, and above all, with the tea he was able to take plenty of preserved milk, for the Thunder was well provided with that most nutritious liquid food.

As he discussed the meal, he bethought him of the state of Helen Vandaleur, and as to what he should do with her—how treat her.

That she was not in possession of her senses was too painfully apparent. And now it occurred to him that she was mad at the time she cast off the tiller rope, and so caused the vessel to sail away from him.

"If so," he said to himself, "how bitterly have I wronged

her. Unhappy girl! That she is mad there can be no doubt; but is she incurably so?"

While he thus mused, Helen, after clearing away the remains of her breakfast, had gone on deck, and all at once he heard her clear, bell-like voice—

"Sail ho!"

## CHAPTER LXXIX.

### TRANSFER OF THE TREASURE.

THE young officer's heart beat high with hope as he heard the welcome cry. He knew that Miss Vandaleur's eyesight was keen, and did not think that, even in her present mental state, that she would give a false alarm.

Going on deck he found her standing by the wreck of the wheel, pointing with outstretched arm to a spot on the port beam. And there his nautical eye at once detected a dim, faint speck, which was, in all probability, a sail. But, unfortunately, it was nearly calm. The wind, what little there was, right astern, and the vessel was slowly passing through the water at the rate of about a knot an hour.

He at once set to work to rig a fresh tackle, and so again get command of the tiller and helm.

While thus employed he observed the broken belaying pin, the giving way of which had caused the shifting of the tiller, and all the subsequent misery he had suffered.

But at the time he did not notice this, and remained in total ignorance as to the way in which the disaster had occurred.

The relieving tackle on, the tiller was soon rigged; and then, calling Helen to assist him, Royston proceeded to haul it over hard a-lee.

The vessel answered shortly to her helm, and came up to the wind on the port tack.

The speck on the horizon was now right a-head, and the wind a-beam; the ship lying almost motionless, save the slight drift to leeward.

There was nothing for it but to wait patiently, in the hope that the sail would approach them, for there was no probability of getting any headway on the ship with so light a breeze full a-beam, and in her dilapidated condition aloft and nearly half full of water as she was below.

Meanwhile he employed himself in getting things as ship-shape as possible—just keeping moving, but, of course, incapable of any violent exertion.

As to Miss Vandaleur, her state gave him great concern. She was restless and excited; incessantly in motion—talking incoherently at times, and always with that terrible, wild glare of the eye.

As the day wore on George Royston observed that his strength, reduced almost to the lowest, was returning very fast. Miss Vandaleur, too, improved in appearance.

His words and wishes had great power over her; and, when he requested her to change her dress and make her toilet, she retired to the after-cabin he had before prepared for her, and did so.

He then bethought himself that he might use the influence he undoubtedly possessed over the unhappy girl for her benefit, and, perhaps, be the means of effecting her cure. He made it his study to soothe and quiet her as much as possible—being careful not to contradict her or cause her the slightest annoyance.

Observing how restless and excited she was, he found her some light employment—getting up stores and so on. This, and anything else he asked her, she readily did; and he noticed that, while thus employed, her restlessness seemed to abate.

And, moreover, he thought that her eyes were less wild and gleaming; altogether, he was of opinion, as evening came on, that she was not getting worse, but was rather improving in her mental state, and he had great hope of her cure.

Meanwhile he busied himself in getting the treasure out of the boat, which was still alongside at the port gangway.

This, in his weak state, was a tedious and fatiguing task. In order to accomplish it he rigged a whip—or single block cle—on the main rigging; and then, going down into the

boat with a bread bag, he put therein as much gold as he thought he could manage, and then clambered on board again, and, with the aid of Helen, who was only too delighted to be of any use, hoisted it on board.

By an hour before sunset he had thus got on board the whole of the treasure—with which the mutineers had embarked in the boat, and for which they had sacrificed their lives—and had safely stowed it in the after-cabin.

Even in their present desolated and forlorn state, he did not forget what he thought his duty, and, as he stowed the last box, he said, aloud—

“Thank heaven, the treasure is all safe ! The Thunder has now on board the exact quantity of gold, to an ounce, with which she started.”

“Would that she had never taken an ounce on board ! That gold has been our curse—the cause of all our misfortunes.”

He looked up in some surprise. Helen’s words were sensible, her manner calm and collected ; and he saw, with pleasure, that there was no longer that restlessness of eye and strange, wild expression.

For the moment her reason had resumed its sway, and she was as sane as himself.

But this did not last long, she soon became restless and excited again, and the wildness of eye and nervous manner returned. Nevertheless, the fact of an interlude of sanity, no matter how brief, was full of promise, and he argued well therefrom.

The sun went down ; and, ere day gave place to night, he took a long, anxious look at the speck on the horizon, which he hoped and believed to be a sail.

But, as he gazed, it appeared to him that it had altered in shape, though it was certainly not nearer.

And then there arose in his mind a suspicion that it was a point of high land, or an island peak. This, however, was only conjecture, and darkness would prevent his knowing, even should the vessel drift nearer to the land, if it were land or the strange sail approach if it were a ship.

That night he slept soundly till some three hours after midnight. When he awoke, he found Helen Vandaleur

whom he had prevailed upon to turn into the berth in the after-cabin, restlessly pacing the deck.

He urged her to go below and try and sleep; but she, wringing her hands, cried pitifully—

“No, no; I cannot sleep. They come all around me. The shadows and phantoms—and you, George Royston, all bleeding—dying. No, I cannot sleep; I will walk the deck.”

As nothing would prevail on her to lie down again, he was forced, though very unwillingly, to yield the point, feeling deeply concerned and alarmed at this new phase of her mental disorder.

Morning broke bright and beautiful, but with the cheerful warming rays of the sun, there came a sad disappointment. The spec on the horizon—ship, land, or whatever it might be—was no longer in sight.

## CHAPTER LXXX.

### THE OPIATE.

THIS was a heavy blow, and it was with a deep sigh that, after convincing himself it was indeed the fact, Royston turned away and gave it up.

And there were other sad discouragements awaiting him, in the state of Miss Vandaleur. She had not slept, or even laid down, all through the night, and was now in a strange state of mind and body—exhausted, yet feverish and restless; tired and weary, and yet unable to rest or even keep still for a moment or two at a time.

Royston soon came to a conclusion regarding her.

“She must sleep or die.”

Forthwith he determined to act on this decision.

He found that he still retained his control over her; except in the matter of endeavouring to take some repose, she was most anxious to please only him.

So he prepared a strong opiate, double as much of the drug as would have been an ordinary dose, and made her

take it. This soon had its effect. In a couple of hours she began to grow drowsy and listless, and shortly afterwards suffered him to lead her to the cabin, where he had the satisfaction of seeing her fast asleep on the couch in a very short time.

Satisfied on this point, he left her and went on deck. The prospect, spite of the lovely weather, calm sea, sunny skies, and gentle winds, was not a lively one to him.

Every day decreased their chance of finally being rescued, as he knew but too well ; for the ship, already water-logged, was steadily leaking ; and he judged that within the last week she had sunk at least ten feet deeper in the water ; and listening at the main and fore-hatch, he could hear the ominous wash and gurgle of the great body of water in the hold as the ship lazily rolled to the long Pacific swell always present, even in the calmest weather.

"If a stiff breeze comes on she will labour and leak more. In any case I doubt whether she will float more than another week," he said to himself.

Fully alive to the danger, our friend, whose spirits and energy seemed to revive with his strength, set to work equipping the lifeboat, in which he had been left adrift.

He put in her five kegs of water, each containing ten gallons—fifty gallons in all ; he calculated that five gallons a week between two, or ten quarts each, would be a tolerable allowance ; and at that rate there would be enough for ten weeks.

Then he had got on board the boat ten bags of biscuit, some cheese, dried fish, and a quantity of preserved provisions, enough to last two of them for two months at least.

The provisions he carefully covered with tarpaulins. Next he got some ammunition and rifles on board, and then set to work to rig a better set of sails for the boat.

He could not accomplish all this in one day, so rested as evening approached, and went into the cabin to see after his patient and to prepare supper.

She showed signs of awaking from the deep sleep into which the opiate had thrown her ; and, when he had prepared the evening meal, he thought it expedient to awaken her.

She arose, looked around her in a dreamy manner, and then came out with him into the saloon, or rather the wreck, the shell of the saloon.

Royston was rejoiced to observe that there was no longer that wildness in her eye, that restlessness of manner, and incapacity of keeping still for a moment.

On the contrary, she seemed languid and tired, and presently said—

“My head aches badly. Have I been ill? How long have I slept?”

Then, placing her elbow on the table, she leaned her forehead wearily on her hand.

“Yes, you have been ill, very ill,” he replied; “and have slept many hours. I have made some strong tea, perhaps that will do your headache good.”

She drank some, and then, looking around her wonderingly, said—

“Then it was not all a dream? I thought it was all some dreadful nightmare; but I see now that the ship is indeed a wreck.”

She paused for a moment or two, and then tremulously asked—

“And are we alone on board the ship?”

“Alone,” he replied briefly.

“Strange, strange—terrible. All alone, you and I. I cannot understand it; cannot remember. Ha! my head; my memory. What has come over me? I remember now; there was desperate fighting, and bloodshed, and murder. And then—what next? Yes, one of the masts broke, and a number were swallowed up in the sea. Then—then—ah! I cannot think.”

“Do not try; come on deck,” urged Royston, “and let us look at this beautiful sunset.”

“But I want to remember,” she went on, speaking in a slow, dreamy manner. “Then they went away, some of the murderers, and there came a great wave and swallowed up all but you and I. Then—ah! this must be a dream—a horrid vision—for I thought you were dead, had perished in an open boat, and that I was alone, quite alone, on this great wreck. But you are here alive, are you not?”



## THE MUTINY OF THE THUNDER.

"Yes, yes; of course I am alive, and well. So it must have been a dream."

"Yes, you are alive, for I hold your hand, and it is quite warm—only thin, so thin. Ah! how you must have suffered."

Thus she wandered on, at times getting a little incoherent.

But, although she was not in full possession of her faculties, it is certain she was much better; and, though her intellect had not yet recovered from the shocks and terrors she had suffered, she was by no means insane.

"Let us come on deck, and see the sunset," he repeated; and she, yielding to him, suffered him to lead her out by the hand.

It was a strange sight to see these two unfortunate companions in trouble standing side by side, watching the glorious sun go down into the sea, a great orb of bright red fire.

That night he gave her another opiate, well satisfied with the effect of the first, and shortly after midnight both of these desolate castaways slept the sleep of the weary.

## CHAPTER LXXXI.

### EXPLANATIONS.

ANOTHER week rolled on, a week of calm, monotonous weather, unvaried by an incident, or the sight of a sail, or land, or anything to relieve the tedium and suspense of hope deferred which Helen Vandaleur and George Royston experienced.

As for the ship, she was a little deeper in the water; but it appeared she had more buoyancy left than he had given her credit for, for as yet she showed no signs of foundering, or, indeed, of becoming utterly water-logged.

And what of Helen Vandaleur?

Thanks to a naturally strong and well-balanced mind, and the judicious treatment of Simon the Sailor, she had quite

regained her reason—recovered entirely from the attack of temporary insanity which had so alarmed her companion in misfortune.

In bodily health and vigour both had wonderfully improved, and Helen especially began to bloom again and regain her beauty. Her memory of all that had occurred was perfectly restored, and she was able to relate to George Royston the unfortunate accident—the breaking of the belaying pin, which caused the ship to pay off before the wind and sail away.

He knew now how deeply he had wronged her in thinking she had purposely deserted him—left him to perish ; and now he saw how improbable, impossible, almost, on her part would such conduct have been.

It was indeed unlikely that a weak girl should voluntarily leave herself utterly alone, and plan the death of one who had already done her such good service, and in whose skill and energy lay almost her only hope of final rescue, and in proportion as he had before hated, almost cursed her, when he thought her a cruel traitress, he now felt drawn towards and fascinated by her.

Her manner to him was frank and genial, and she did not seek to disguise her gratitude for all he had done. There was no shade of embarrassment or false shame, and yet there was a something in her manner, he could not tell what, which did not altogether please him.

She seemed to wish to avoid certain subjects, and would not talk about the old times when they were lovers, plighted to each other

He felt a little bitter at times, when the conviction of this forced itself on him. It seemed to him as if this was the state of affairs. She did not attempt to conceal her gratitude to him for all he had done and suffered for her sake, and yet was unwilling to admit him to a closer and dearer intimacy on that account.

In plain words, she was grateful for services rendered, but did not wish on that account to favour his suit—his aspirations to her hand—if, indeed, after all that had occurred, he still nourished any.

This was his explanation of her manner and reserve on

some subjects ; he may have been wrong, may have been right ; but at all events he could not shake off the thoughts, and felt sometimes very sore, and even a little angry on this point ; but he was careful not to show any anger, to exhibit any feeling at all on the subject, for he was as proud as Miss Vandaleur.

And so they lived on board the same vessel, these two, day after day, on terms of friendship and cordiality even, and yet, somehow, each knew that there was a gulf between them.

She had a vague fear and suspicion, that, while temporarily bereft of reason, she had spoken or acted in a manner she should not have done.

Royston had too much delicacy and regard for her feelings even to hint at the passionate love she had lavished on him ; but knowing her own heart, her own feelings towards him, she feared she had betrayed herself ; and, moreover, she had some vague, some very faint memory of the sort ; and when she thought on the subject, she felt ashamed and angry with herself, and her manner towards him underwent some slight change ; and while noticing that she was colder and more reserved, he attributed it to a determination on her part to let him see the hopelessness of any pretensions to her hand should they ultimately be saved.

These, however, were but trifles, comparatively speaking ; and, all things considered, they lived tolerably comfortable, she occupying the after cabin he had prepared for her, while he made use of a smaller berth he had knocked up for himself in the fore part of the shell of the saloon.

They were polite and good humoured, and no ill-tempered or harsh word ever passed between them.

All their talk was of the future — of their chance of coming across a sail, and as to how much longer the vessel would float, for, of course, both dreaded having to take to the open boat.

After the week's fine, sunny, calm weather, there came some days of rain, mists, and rather severe squalls of wind.

It was at the close of one of these days, about an hour after sunset, that an event of tremendous consequence to our castaways occurred.

## CHAPTER LXXXII.

## LAND.

FOR three days previous to the important event which we shall presently narrate, the Thunder had been sailing steadily on a northerly course, running before a southerly wind.

Nevertheless, Royston allowed the ship to sail on, and indeed spread all possible canvas to increase her speed.

He had resolved on this as the most hopeful course after long consideration.

For, he argued, it was more probable that they would fall in with a vessel while the Thunder was herself sailing along, and each day traversing fresh tracts of ocean, than if she lay still in the same place.

Of course, while she thus sailed along at night, or in misty weather, there was the danger of her coming into collision with another ship ; but this was not likely. Even if it should occur, the risk was more than compensated for by the advantage.

And as to coming across reefs, rocks, or running ashore, Royston anticipated no danger.

He was not aware of any land in the direction in which he was now steering.

And so the big ship blundered on, like some huge animal, blind and wounded.

Their life was monotonous, certainly ; but except for the constant yearning hope for rescue—the hope deferred which makes the heart sick—it was pleasant enough.

They had food and shelter, and all their physical wants were well supplied.

Southerly and south easterly breezes prevailed ; and as Royston found it impossible to keep her on a wind, he let her run free, hoping to come across the track of some whaler or ship bound from California, either round Cape Horn or to Australia.

The boat which he had carefully fitted up with provisions and every necessary, he kept towing astern, all that could be damaged by wet being carefully covered with tarpaulins.

He well knew that unless being picked up by some vessel, it would be ultimately necessary to take to the boat.

Of course, as the ship was steadily leaking, and settling down in the water, it was only a question of time how long she would float.

The prospect was a most unsatisfactory and gloomy one. Being afloat on the wide ocean, in an open boat, even though well provided with food and water, would be very different to their present comparatively comfortable condition.

But, however, he kept up his spirits, hoped for the best, and endeavoured to sustain the courage of his companion, who, as day after day passed in the same monotonous manner, with no welcome sail to gladden their eyes, began to grow down-hearted.

And in good truth, though they were not in want of physical comforts, their life on board the Thunder was dreary and desolate, and as day after day rolled on, hope began to grow feebler, until at this time of which we speak, Miss Vandaleur had settled down into a state of quiet melancholy and listless apathy.

Beyond helping to prepare the morning and evening meals, there was no occupation, no employment, to direct her mind from the contemplation of their state.

The sun shone in the east, revealing a vast expanse of ocean, without any object to relieve the profound solitude. The sun rose to the zenith, still glaring over the same vast plain of water, with nothing in sight save the wreck like hull of the Thunder lazily ploughing the waves.

The sun sank to the western horizon and slowly disappeared, and darkness closed over the same dreary, desolate scene.

And so day after day passed on with scarce any change, any alteration in the state of affairs, save that slowly, though perceptibly, the vessel sank deeper and yet deeper in the water, and became more and more a mere water-logged hull.

Morning after morning, so soon as the sun rose, each of

## LAND.

our ocean castaways would gaze eagerly around, over the great field of waters, straining their eyes, anxiously hoping to sight that sail whose appearance never gladdened their eyes.

And evening after evening, ere the sun went down, one on the forecastle, the other on the poop, would gaze as earnestly with a long, lingering look, ere darkness closed in on the scene.

Then, with a sigh, they would give it up and meet in the cabin, over the evening meal, silent and sad, more grave-faced every day.

For, of course, they were fully conscious that each time the sun set without sail or land in sight, their prospects of ultimate escape from their floating prison grew less and less, and the end grew nearer.

It was some hours after midnight, and both were asleep, when a slight shock awoke Royston.

At first he thought it was fancy, and lay half awake. But all at once there came another and far severer shock, followed by a grating and bumping, of unmistakeable import to a sailor.

Springing to his feet, he involuntarily cried—

“Land ho! The ship has struck!”

Then Miss Vandaleur appeared at the entrance of her cabin in her night toilette.

“Land! land!” she cried, echoing his words. “Then we are saved! saved!”

The ship struck again with such violence as nearly to throw them from their feet.

Royston realised the danger, while she thought only of the fact that they had gained land.

“Aye,” he answered, “saved, perhaps, or—lost!” Then he hurried on deck.

## THE MUTINY OF THE THUNDER.

### CHAPTER LXXXIII.

#### A NIGHT OF ANXIETY.

THE night was pitch dark ; so, when Royston gained the deck he found it absolutely impossible to ascertain the state of affairs, or the true position of the vessel. There was one fact obvious ; the ship had struck either on a rocky shore or on a reef.

That was a certainty, and each moment the grinding and crunching of her bottom confirmed it.

The situation was desperate. That she could float even for a few minutes was very doubtful.

The question depended altogether on whether she was right aground or not, only striking against the reef or rocks, dashed against them by the waves.

If she was in deep water, merely banging against the hard rocks, she must sink in a few minutes, seconds even.

If, on the other hand, she was hard and fast on the reef, then, as she filled, she might settle down : and if such were the case, safety, for the time at least, was secured.

After a bit she began to settle down, and the bumping and grinding became less violent, and it seemed likely that she was fairly on a reef.

Still, however, she might slip off at any moment, and sink in deep water.

Gradually the vessel got further on the reef, and, lifted by a wave larger than common, her bows were hoisted on a sort of ledge or rock.

She now lay with her fore part considerably higher than her stern, which latter was slowly lifted up and down by the sea, bumping occasionally in a manner which bespoke ill for her bottom.

The rest of the night was passed in a state of desperate anxiety by the two lonely occupants of the wreck—for a wreck she was now beyond all question, not only as regarded

her masts and rigging, but her hull, in which several holes must have been knocked.

The boat must have been got up alongside, so that at a moment's notice they might take refuge in her if the vessel seemed likely to sink under their feet.

But this prospect was by no means a pleasant one.

The night was very dark ; there was a considerable swell, and also a current by which the open boat might be dashed against the reef and swamped almost directly she was cast off from the ship.

Helen Vandaleur and George Royston stood together at the port gangway, which seemed to be nearest to the reef. The former held a lantern above the rail, while both eagerly peered out into the darkness to try and make out land, or even the rocks upon which the ship had struck, and now lay hard and fast.

But they could see nothing, save the white tops of the breakers, which gleamed with a phosphorescent light.

"Are we in great danger?" asked Helen, anxiously.

"We have been in danger for many days," he replied ; "desperate danger, at times."

"Yes ; but I mean, are we in danger of sinking at once—immediately? Tell me the truth ; it is best to be prepared.

"I will tell you the truth. So long as the vessel lies on this ridge or basin of reef, and the weather is calm, so that she does not bump too violently, I think she may hold together ; but should she slip off into deep water, or should a gale come on, she would very soon go to pieces, and then we should have to take to the boat, and hope for some hospitable, or, at all events, fertile shore near this reef, where we could manage to exist until seen and taken off by some ship."

"A dismal prospect. We might find ourselves cast on some arid, desolate island."

"But again—and I think it more probable—we might find ourselves on some fertile, lovely shore ; for you must know that the greater part of the Pacific Islands are very lovely—smothered with verdure—with beautiful, white, sandy beach ; lagoons swarming with fish, mountains with clear rivulets,



clear skies, placid blue sea, and, altogether, island paradises.

He spoke cheerfully, hoping to encourage her and keep up her spirits. Perhaps even a little too enthusiastically.

She noticed it, and looked him hard in the face; while a strange expression came over her own features, denoting that her secret thoughts were not altogether pleasant.

"He speaks as though he and I were destined to spend our lives on this island—our whole lives—and together. He speaks as though he looked forward to such a prospect without regret—with pleasure even."

His words and manner displeased her—alarmed her proud, but somewhat too suspicious nature.

She answered coldly—

"The prospect of spending months—weeks even—alone on an island with no one except yourself, Mr. Royston, is, to me, full of horror, and you talk of it as though it were something rather desirable."

"Yet we have been alone together on board this vessel for some time," he said.

"Yes, and a wretched miserable time it has been. Often I have been wicked enough to wish myself dead."

"I am sorry that I have so utterly failed in all my efforts to make you as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances. Perhaps you are sorry that I ever succeeded in regaining the ship when you had it all to yourself."

The speech was unjust to her, nor did he himself believe for a moment that she had any such feeling.

But he felt angry at her words and tones.

She, too, was angry; but her anger vanished at his words, and she felt deeply pained by them.

She respected, admired, and was deeply grateful for all he had done for her. And yet her pride was always rising in arms. Her sensitiveness, amounting almost to suspiciousness, was always impelling her to say or do something rude, so as to repel him—to keep him at a distance.

Truly her position, utterly alone and dependent on a young man, and that man a former lover, was a delicate one. In truth, it was not altogether pride, but an exaggerated sense of modesty and consciousness of the awkwardness of her

position which gave rise to much of her coldness, harshness, even, towards him.

On this occasion, however, she wished to apologise, and had just begun assuring him, with tears in her eyes, that she never had, and never could have, any feeling but of the greatest joy at his regaining the ship, when he abruptly moved away, walked aft, and commenced busying himself about the boat.

The rest of the night Miss Vandaleur had no opportunity of speaking to him. He occupied himself constantly in some way or another ; principally in getting up stores from the store-room and after-hold, which was already half full of water, and removing them forward.

The dawn of day breaking slowly in the east found him still at work ; while she, sad and pensive, watched him in silence, occasionally turning her eager eyes through the open port out over the sea, seeking to discover the land which, it was certain, must be quite close.

On the nature of that land—whether fertile island or barren rock—would depend, in great measure, not only their comfort but even their lives, if, as was probable, the ship should break up and sink.

## CHAPTER LXXXIV.

### THE BEACON FIRE.

HELEN VANDALEUR came running along the deck in a state of wild excitement, her hair flying loose behind her, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling.

George Royston at the time was busy in hoisting a coil of new rope from the forehold, and, suddenly looking up, was astonished to see her running towards him in such an excited state. She seemed unable to speak for a time, but pointed and waved her right arm.

“What is it? What is the matter?” he asked, in great bewilderment.

"Look! look!" she cried. "Saved! saved! Ah! I knew that Providence would come to our assistance."

He did not understand her, nor what she could mean by pointing and gesticulating so frantically.

A terrible suspicion crossed his mind.

Her mind had suffered—in plain words, she was again mad.

"My dear young lady, pray calm yourself," he said, soothingly. "There is nothing there. Nothing to alarm you. It is all your fancy."

"Yes! yes!" she cried, vehemently. "There is—a sail—a sail!"

He started, ran to the starboard bulwarks, and looked out in the direction in which she pointed.

He had little or no hope of discovering a sail, for only a quarter of an hour previously he had himself looked carefully around.

But he was mistaken; for, in a second or two, his practised eye rested on a dark spot on the north-eastern horizon, which he knew could be nothing else but a vessel of some sort.

The wind was very light, and even if she was standing right towards them, it must be an hour or so before she would be close enough to see the dismantled hull of the good ship 'Thunder.

The land would be in sight from her decks before the vessel was; but then it was not probable that she should visit this group of islands, where there was no port, no stores to be obtained, unless she should be short of water, in which case she might try these islands.

And as he gazed, behold a column of smoke rose from the dark spot.

"A steamer!" he cried.

"A steamer!" re-echoed Helen Vandaleur, who had come over to his side.

"Ah! then she will be here directly! Is she coming this way? For heaven's sake, tell me if she is steering towards us?"

"I think so," replied Royston, after a long, careful look; "but I can't say for certain."

Meanwhile, there was nothing to be done except to endeavour to attract the attention of the strange sail.

Accordingly, Royston got a large flag, and, going aloft himself, hung it on the topsail lift, so as to display as much surface as possible to the vessel.

When he came down he found Helen Vandaleur seated on a spar under the bulwarks, her face in her hands, crying hysterically.

She started up when she heard Royston approach, and said—

“ Oh ! Mr. Royston, you must think me very strange. I am crying not for sorrow, but for joy. I feel as though I could leap overboard and swim to meet the welcome ship I see coming.”

Royston smiled sadly.

It was now nearly sundown, and there was not wind enough to send a vessel along at the rate of even a couple of knots an hour.

“ Why do you look so doubtful—so sad ? ” she asked. “ Is not the steamer coming ? will she not be here very soon ? ”

“ I have made a discovery which is not favourable to our hopes,” he said.

“ What is that ? ”

“ She is not a steamer.”

“ Not a steamer ? ” cried Helen, starting to her feet ; “ but I can see the smoke.”

“ Yes, you can see smoke, but not the smoke of a steamer.”

“ What then, in heaven’s name ? ” she passionately asked.

“ Ah, a ship on fire ! ”

“ No, only a whale ship. She is boiling down the blubber—what sailors call ‘ trying out ’ her oil. It is the smoke of her furnaces we see.”

“ But she is coming this way.”

“ If she sees us, as I doubt not she will do ; but if she does not make out our signals it is very uncertain, for she is probably hove-to.”

“ Oh ! but she must see us,” cried Helen, frantically. “ We can see her quite plainly.”

"It is the smoke makes her so conspicuous. I see the sun is setting; it will be dark soon."

"Then we must hasten ashore, and light a big-beacon fire, so that she cannot fail to see it."

"I fear what you propose is impossible," replied Royston, calmly. "We have no wood dry enough to make a big blaze."

She approached him, her expressive eyes glittering, her hands clenched."

"Ah!" she cried, "you will not light a fire. You do all you can to damp my hopes. You wish, I do believe, that the ship should sail on without seeing us. I can only dimly guess at your motive, George St. Cymon Royston; but such I think to be the fact."

He said not a word in reply to this imputation, which was utterly unfounded, of course, but turned a shade paler, and gazed steadfastly over the sea at the spot on the horizon and the column of smoke.

This seemed to make her still more angry.

"But it shall not be as you wish," she cried, fiercely, stamping her foot on the ground. "I myself will go on shore in the boat alone, if you refuse to help me, and do my best to make a beacon fire."

"It would be useless," he said, "quite useless"

"Which means that you will not help me. Then I will go alone. The sea is calm, and, you know, I have learned how to scull a boat."

Instantly acting on her words, she made haste to the gangway on the other side, and, before he could explain or expostulate, got down into the boat, and cast off the painter.

He ran after her, and called as the boat slowly drifted away—

"Helen! for heaven's sake do not be rash!"

"How dare you call me Helen?" she cried, anger and excitement quite overpowering all her feelings. "What right have you to address me thus?"

The words were enough to exasperate a stoic, following on her previous unworthy and unjust suspicions.

"I will make a fire!" he cried, "a big fire. It is dangerous, but I will light a big fire on board."

"I will not come back till I see you fulfil your word. Light a beacon fire on board, and I will believe you. Till then I will remain in the boat. I challenge you to fulfil your word."

"Was there ever such a woman?" said Royston to himself, with almost a groan. "Who can be prudent and wise in face of her taunts and cruel words? I will light a fire, and pray heaven that we may not both rue it."

"I will do as you wish," he continued, now addressing his companion. "There shall be a big fire in half an hour—a fire that should be seen—I should think must be seen—from the ship."

"Very good; I will remain where I am, in the boat," she said.

And then this strange girl took the scull, the use of which he had taught her, and, by an occasional motion, counteracted the current, and kept the boat in the same relative position.

She had conceived the idea—only the creation of a mind morbidly excited and weakened—that Royston wished to keep her on the island, to live there altogether as his wife. And her proud spirit rebelled thereat.

And so she stood in the stern of the boat, calmly waiting for him to light the beacon fire as he had promised on board the ship, scarcely believing that he would do so.

A quarter of an hour passed. No fire. A half hour, and she grew impatient.

Just then a column of black smoke rose from the forecastle, and in two minutes a flame appeared, which soon increased to a great, glaring blaze, ascending high aloft, licking the forestays and rigging, and lighting up the whole ship, for it was now all but dark.

Her heart smote her.

"Perhaps I have been unjust," she said to herself.

But then again the demon of human pride whispered to her—

"No; he could not have done it, had I not dared and defied him—had I not gone away in the boat myself, to light a fire on shore."

The flame increased in intensity and fury, till when she

came alongside the ship once more, its terrible roar frightened her.

When she came on deck the whole fore part of the vessel was one blaze of light.

"There is little fear but that this will be seen from the vessel in the offing, Miss Vandaleur. If it is *not* seen, it will be a terrible misfortune for you and for me."

## CHAPTER LXXXV.

### THE ONLY SON.

SHE did not seem to gather the full meaning of George Royston's words.

"A terrible misfortune," she said. "Yes, of course, if the vessel does not see us, it will be a great misfortune."

"Yes ; but doubly so in our case."

"And why?"

"Because in a very short time there will be nothing left of the good ship Thunder above water except, perhaps, a few charred beams and planks."

"Nothing left ! I do not understand."

"Do you not perceive that the ship is on fire, and that I have no power to subdue or even lessen the flames."

"Ha ! and the vessel will be totally consumed?"

"Yes, unless she slips from off the ledge of rocks on which she now lies, and sinks to the bottom. We must trust to the boat, and that reminds me that there is little time to spare," he added.

"If, then, the vessel does not see or pay any heed to the blaze, we shall be left here with nothing but an open boat?" she said.

"Nothing but an open boat, and the island you see yonder," he replied, quietly. "You forced me to it, challenged me to make a big blaze, and even insulted me by false and unworthy imputations. I did so, and the consequence is that the ship will be burned to the water's edge."

"And all the gold lost—that gold which has proved so

disastrous ; all my father's fortune embarked on board this ship will be lost in the depths of the sea, and by your doing !”

This was one of the most unjust and ungenerous speeches she had ever made, and he could, had he so chosen, have retorted that but for his exertion and courage that not only would the gold have been lost, but that she must have perished herself, as had all the other passengers and crew of the ill-fated Thunder.

But he forbore—sick at heart with endless quarrels and misunderstandings, nearly all brought about by her overweening pride and unjust suspicions of him.

“In all probability the gold will be lost. It cannot be helped. I have done my duty—done my very best.”

When she considered for a moment, she could not but own that his words were strictly justified by the facts.

“You must make all haste now,” he said, quickly, “and get together what few things you require in the way of clothing and so forth, to put in the boat. I perceive that the progress of the fire in the fore part of the vessel has caused her to shift her position. She may slide off the rocks at any moment.

He himself, then, with the greatest possible despatch, got a quantity of stores, rope, sails, tool-chest, firearms, and ammunition together, and hastily threw them over the side into the boat which lay alongside.

He did not neglect water and provisions, and, indeed, loaded the boat with every possible article which he thought might be useful.

For he had looked ahead, and saw before him the possibility of the whaling ships passing by without taking any notice of the blaze, and in such a case they would have to depend on their own resources, or what the island might produce.

It was with feelings of considerable dismay that Helen saw the progress of the fire, and also noticed that the vessel began to roll slightly, and was obviously moving.

By the time she had put on her clothes and some other necessities, the whole fore part of the vessel was one sheet of fire.



The heat was almost intolerable, and such was the roaring and crackling of the flames that Royston had to shout to make her hear.

"Quick! Get into the boat. There is not a minute to be lost!"

He perceived by certain indications, that what remained of the vessel was on the point of shifting from its rocky bed, and would sink to the bottom the instant it did so.

The boat was heavily laden; for the sea being calm, he had thrown in everything he came across.

It was a work requiring care and skill to get her clear of the burning vessel, which now commenced to roll—her timbers creaking and groaning as though she were making complaint of being thus devoured by the flames, after having gone through so many perils of the sea.

Scarcely had they got clear of what was now but a burning wreck, than the fore-mast fell with a great crash, all blazing as it was into the sea.

The stern was still aground, but that, too, sank considerably lower, and as there were portions of the hull above water still burning, Royston saw that the total destruction of the vessel by fire, or her being engulfed by the angry waves, was a matter of certainty.

It turned out as he had anticipated.

Resting on his oars at a distance of about fifty yards from the blazing wreck, he and Helen Vandaleur watched the progress of the fire; and finally, just as the flames reached the poop, the burning wreck of the Thunder gave another lurch seawards, and then, with a prodigious hissing and sputtering, as the burning part went under water, finally disappeared.

"A fitting end of the Mutiny of the Thunder," said Royston, sadly. "We have seen the last of the good ship now, and all my efforts have proved abortive."

"And with her," said Helen Vandaleur, "all my father's fortune has gone to the bottom of the sea. Had you not set fire to the ship so rashly, the gold might have been saved, for see, yonder is the whale ship coming to our assistance."

Royston said never a word, but remained buried in thought.

Considering that it was she herself who was the cause of

his setting light to a barrel of tar—the only way he could think of to obtain a big blaze—it was, he justly thought, the very acme of audacity on her part to lay the blame of the loss of her father's gold on his shoulders.

He remained for fully five minutes, his head bowed down, buried in deep thought.

Then he rose, and said, quietly—

“Perhaps, Miss Vandaleur, your father's gold may be restored to him yet some day.”

She did not understand him—had no idea as to what he was driving at.

“How can that be? Have we not seen the wreck sink to the bottom with the gold on board? How can my father's share ever be restored to him?”

“I will restore it to him, or at least make the attempt.”

“I do not understand you,” she replied. “Yonder comes the vessel to take us off. At least we should be thankful that our lives are spared.”

“You will understand all in good time,” he said, gloomily, and, seating himself at the oars, he rowed the boat towards the place where the vessel had disappeared.

The mizen-top and the stump of the topmast were still above water, to mark the place where the wreck lay.

He now proceeded to attach one end of a coil of small rope to the boat's grapnel or anchor, and dropped it over on to the wreck, ascertaining by hauling on it that it had taken hold.

Then to the other end of the line he fastened a life-buoy, and threw it overboard.

“Why have you done that?” she asked, a vague feeling of uneasiness coming over her.

“To mark the position of the sunken wreck,” he said. “That gold must be recovered.”

“But how?” she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders, and replied, calmly—

“At present that is more than I can say. That is as yet hidden in the bosom of the future. We shall see in due time.”

He said no more, but commenced slowly rowing the boat in the direction of the land.

"Why are you rowing towards the shore?" she asked.

"Because I wish to land all these stores and provisions, arms, ammunition, and so forth."

"But the vessel is coming. I can see her quite plainly now that the moon has risen. If you wish to preserve them, it would be best to put them on board the ship at once."

"No," he said, quietly, and shaking his head, "I want them on shore."

She had not the most remote idea as to what was his meaning, or why he wanted all these things to put on shore.

"The wind is light," he said. "The vessel will not be close up for an hour at least yet. There is plenty of time for me to unload the boat."

She said no more, and having gained the shore, he proceeded to land everything on the sandy beach, with the exception of what belonged to Helen Vandaleur.

This done, he again took the oars, and proceeded to row out to the wreck again.

By this time the strange vessel had approached within about a mile, and her captain, probably fearing sunken rocks and reefs, hove her to.

Royston now proceeded to run out to her, and in half an hour was alongside the whaler, *Only Son*, of Nantucket.

Royston and Helen were soon on the deck of the vessel.

"Thank God for this, and all His other mercies!" cried the latter, fervently, as her foot touched the deck. "After all we have suffered, all we have lost, we have, at least, escaped with our lives."

"But the gold—the gold," said Royston, calmly, but in a gloomy manner. "The gold must be reclaimed."

## CHAPTER LXXXVI.

### THE FAREWELL.

THE two survivors of the terrible mutiny of the *Thunder* walked slowly to the cabin, to which the captain of the whaler conducted them.

Now that she was safely on board a vessel, after all the perils, disasters, and fatigues she had undergone on board

the ill-fated Thunder, Helen Vandalenr experienced a total and singular change of feeling.

Suspicion, bitterness, pride, fear, all evil thoughts about her companion, George Royston, vanished—dispelled like morning mist by the advent of the sun.

After asking her to be seated, the captain addressed himself to Royston.

“What ship was that we saw on fire, and which has just gone down?”

“The Thunder, from Sydney, bound to London.”

“And the rest of the crew?”

“All hands, crew and passengers, have perished, except myself, second mate of the ship, and this lady,” replied Royston.

“All hands lost! A bad affair this. Cargo—was it valuable?”

“About half a million of gold alone.”

“Whew! Jerusalem, what a treasure to be utterly lost—sunk to the bottom of the sea!”

“I did my very best to save both ship and gold,” said Royston, gloomily. “Hitherto I have failed. Fortune—fate—providence—call it what you will, seemed determined to defeat all my efforts, even though our lives were to be spared.”

“Indeed, sir,” said Helen, to the captain of the whaler, “what Mr. Royston says about his doing his very best is strictly true. He behaved like a hero—fought and defeated the mutineers again and again; and even when our circumstances seemed most desperate, did not lose heart, but kept up our flagging spirits by his own splendid example of constancy, bravery, and determination.”

Royston replied not a word to this panegyric, and the skipper of the *Only Son* said—

“A mutiny, eh? From what I gather, then, you have had a rough time of it. Let us hear the story, if you are not too much beat, Mr. Royston—I think the lady called you.”

“I am, thank heaven, in tolerably good health. You see we were not short of provisions or water, fortunately.”

“Perhaps the lady would like to go into one of the cabins and change her clothes; I see they are scorched in places

by the fire. Here, steward, tell Mr. Walters to get the lady's dunnage on board out of the boat ; then show her to one of the empty cabins, and bring the spirit-stand and biscuits."

Helen's effects, which Royston had thrown into the boat, before leaving the Thunder, were got on board ; and she was by no means sorry of the opportunity to make her toilette while Royston narrated to the captain of the whaler the tragic history of the Mutiny of the Thunder.

Royston had finished his narrative when Miss Vandaleur rejoined them.

"Now what about this gold, which has gone down with the vessel? Do you feel disposed to remain with your ship and endeavour to reclaim it? The salvage will be a large sum."

"Reclaim it—how is it to be done? The vessel has gone to the bottom, and, doubtless, by this time, is broken up, and the gold dispersed and washed away by the sea and buried in the sand. It would be only waste of time ; the attempt would be madness. We have made a most prosperous cruise. My vessel is full up to the hatches with oil. I am well satisfied with my share of the venture, and so are all my men with theirs. I shall make the best of my way back."

"You are not then disposed to remain and endeavour to recover this gold?"

"No, sirree," replied the Yankee. "I guess my owners wouldn't be very well pleased if I was to keep their ship, with a full cargo, looking about after a sunken treasure for three or four months, perhaps."

"You have quite made up your mind, then?"

"I have so. I'm bound for Nantucket, right off," was the curt reply.

"So much the worse for you."

"That's a matter of opinion."

"And the better for me, if I recover the gold."

"If you recover the gold! I don't understand. I ain't going to stop, and it appears to me that settles the matter."

"Oh, dear, no!" replied Royston, quite calmly, and to the utter amazement and dismay even of Miss Vandaleur, who, having finished her toilette, stood a short distance off, and could hear every word of the conversation. "I shall stop and get back the gold."

"What, stop here on this desert island?"

"Not a desert island, but I think, on the contrary, an extremely fertile one."

"Well, it's uninhabited, except by savages, that's a certainty."

"That may be," replied the second mate of the unlucky Thunder; "but, nevertheless, I shall remain. I suppose you will not refuse to sell me some stores—tools, rope, and iron?"

"You ain't serious, mister?" asked the whaler, gazing at our hero in unfeigned astonishment.

"Quite serious," replied Royston, calmly. "I consider it my duty to recover that gold."

"Well, I've heard of a man sticking to his ship till she went down, but I never heard of any one sticking to a ship after she was at the bottom of the sea."

"I shall do what I have said," replied Royston, calmly.

"You are really serious in this mad resolve?" asked Helen, in great agitation.

She knew the determined character of the young officer, and her heart sank within her at the thought of his being left alone on a savage island.

"Perfectly serious, Miss Vandaleur," he said. "I will do my utmost to recover your father's gold—his whole fortune, you said, when you so generously remarked that it was through my fault that it was lost."

"Surely, Mr. Royston, you do not treasure up in your memory and bear malice, for a few hasty, rude words?"

"I have had many rude words from you, Helen."

She replied never a word, but walked out on the deck of the whaler.

A tempest of emotions raged in her breast; at one moment she said to herself that she would remain with him—share his hardships and perils, as had been the case on board the Thunder.

But then came the thought, how could she, a proud, virtuous girl, voluntarily choose to live alone on a desert island with a man—and that man not her husband, though at one time her lover?

So she dismissed the thought, and resolved, not without

pain and bitter heart-burntng, that if he decided to remain, and endeavour to reclaim the treasure, it must be alone."

"But," she said to herself, "as soon as I arrive safely in England, I will move heaven and earth to have a ship fitted out and sent to this island to assist him, and if he finds the task hopeless, to bring him off. The greater part of my father's fortune is, I know, lost in the Thunder. But I have a small property in my own right. I will sell that, and if it is not enough, I will go begging to rich relations. He shall not be left to perish miserably, even though it be through his own headstrong folly."

Royston, as she had expected, adhered to his resolution.

The captain of the whaler agreed to lay-to all night, and promised in the morning to supply and put on shore what stores and provisions he wanted ; in fact, to supply him with everything he might require.

The forenoon was occupied in landing stores for his use, and erecting a tarpaulin tent and flagstaff, so that he could signal any ship which might come in sight.

This, and much more, was all done by the men of the whaler, who were eager to render service to this bold adventurer, who, of his own free-will, chose to remain on an uninhabited and unexplored island.

From all ages, deeds of daring, and such desperate adventures as this which the young officer had resolved to undertake, excite the admiration and respect of men.

The sun sank towards the horizon. The hour of the last farewell came.

Helen Vandaleur's pride was all vanquished now, and her woman's heart had complete sway

She wept bitterly as she wrung the hand of her old lover, for what might be the last time.

Now that he was about to leave her, she realised how much her happiness, her peace of mind, depended upon him—that he was all in all to her—that she loved him.

Even he, though he had, he thought, schooled himself to betray no emotion, could not part with his old love without a pang at the heart—a tear in the eye.

To hide his weakness, he wrung her hand, and said, in faltering weakness —

" Good-bye—God bless you, Helen ! We may meet again some day. Once more—farewell !"

Then he hurried over the side into the boat, and was rowed ashore.

. . . . .

The sun went down in the west as he disappeared amidst a halo of red glory, the Only Son weighed anchor, and stood out to sea.

We have said that the sailors had put up a tent and flag-staff on a high point of land, for the use of the voluntary castaway.

He had a set of signals and a signal code, which the Yankee captain had given him.

As the Only Son spread her sails to the breeze, he bent on four flags, and hoisted them, with the telegraph flag, as it is called, above them, thus—

3	2	0	8
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These, according to the mercantile code of signals, signified the word " FAREWELL."

And presently looking through his telescope, he saw the figure of Miss Helen Vandaleur at the topsail of the Only Son.

With her own bare hands she was bending on flags to the signal halyards, as an answering signal ; she herself hoisted it.

4	3	2	7
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This was the signal. His heart beat high, and a flush caused by hope, pleasure, or excitement, spread over his face, as, on referring to the signal code, he read the answering signal—" I SHALL RETURN."



That was all; but to the heart of the lonely, self-exiled outcast, it spoke volumes.

"She will return, she says," he murmured. "I believe her; for, though proud, and with many other faults, she is truthful. She will return, it may be after years. Where shall I be? What will be my fate? Bah!" he cried, suddenly leaping to his feet. "I shall succeed—I will succeed! Fortune favours the brave, and I will win the fickle jade to my service. I will conquer all obstacles. I see success—triumph before me. I will recover the gold, and will lay at the feet of proud Helen Vandaleur her father's fortune, which and her life, I fought so hard and suffered so much to preserve."

The sun went down, and night closed on the scene. Slowly the departing vessel faded from the sight of the lowly adventurer, and as darkness wrapped all nature in her sable mantle, George St. Cymon Royston realised, in all its terrible intensity, his utter loneliness and desolation.

He was alone—a solitary adventurer—a waif in an unknown island in the midst of the vast Pacific.

And here we will close this history of the "Mutiny of the Thunder," and the big fight for the half million of gold, resulting in the sinking of ship and treasure to the bottom of the sea.

. . . . .

Perhaps some of those who have followed the fortunes of George Royston and the ship Thunder may wish to hear of his further adventures among the South Sea Islands, and the history of his attempt to recover the gold; also whether Helen Vandaleur kept her word. If there be such, their wishes will be amply satisfied in the Sequel to this volume, and which will be published under the title of "**THE GOLDEN REEF; OR, A DIVE FOR HALF A MILLION.**"

**THE END.**





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